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(54) Title: HIGH-STRENGTH MICROWAVE ANTENNA ASSEMBLIES AND METHODS OF USE

(57) Abstract: High-strength microwave antenna assemblies and methods of use are described herein. The microwave antenna has a radiating portion connected by a feedline to a power generating source, e.g., a generator. The antenna is a dipole antenna with the distal end of the radiating portion being tapered and terminating at a tip to allow for direct insertion into tissue. The antenna can be used individually or in combination with multiple antennas to create a combined ablation field. When multiple antennas are used, microwave energy can be applied simultaneously to all the antennas or sequentially between the antennas. Furthermore, to facilitate positioning the antennas in or near the tissue to be treated, RF energy may be applied at the tip of the antenna to assist in cutting through the tissue.

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HIGH-STRENGTH MICROWAVE ANTENNA ASSEMBLIES AND METHODS OF USE

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application claims the benefit of priority to U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 10/272,058, entitled "High-Strength Microwave Antenna Assemblies And Methods Of Use" filed October 15, 2002, which is a continuation-in-part of U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 10/052,848 filed November 2, 2001, each of which is incorporated herein by reference in its entirety.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0002] The invention relates generally to microwave antenna probes and methods of their use which may be used in tissue ablation applications. More particularly, the invention relates to microwave antennas which may be inserted directly into tissue for diagnosis and treatment of diseases.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0003] In the treatment of diseases such as cancer, certain types of cancer cells have been found to denature at elevated temperatures which are slightly lower than temperatures normally injurious to healthy cells. These types of treatments, known generally as hyperthermia therapy, typically utilize electromagnetic radiation to heat diseased cells to temperatures above 41° C while maintaining adjacent healthy cells at lower temperatures where irreversible cell destruction will not occur. Other procedures utilizing electromagnetic radiation to heat tissue also include ablation and coagulation of the tissue. Such microwave ablation procedures, e.g., such as those performed for menorrhagia, are typically done to ablate and coagulate the targeted tissue to denature or kill it. Many procedures and types of devices utilizing electromagnetic radiation therapy are known in the art. Such microwave therapy is typically used in the treatment of tissue and organs such as the prostate, heart, and liver.

[0004] One non-invasive procedure generally involves the treatment of tissue (e.g., a tumor) underlying the skin via the use of microwave energy. The

microwave energy is able to non-invasively penetrate the skin to reach the underlying tissue. However, this non-invasive procedure may result in the unwanted heating of healthy tissue. Thus, the non-invasive use of microwave energy requires a great deal of control. This is partly why a more direct and precise method of applying microwave radiation has been sought.

[0005] Presently, there are several types of microwave probes in use, e.g., monopole, dipole, and helical. One type is a monopole antenna probe, which consists of a single, elongated microwave conductor exposed at the end of the probe. The probe is sometimes surrounded by a dielectric sleeve. The second type of microwave probe commonly used is a dipole antenna, which consists of a coaxial construction having an inner conductor and an outer conductor with a dielectric separating a portion of the inner conductor and a portion of the outer conductor. In the monopole and dipole antenna probe, microwave energy generally radiates perpendicularly from the axis of the conductor.

[0006] The typical microwave antenna has a long, thin inner conductor which extends along the axis of the probe and is surrounded by a dielectric material and is further surrounded by an outer conductor around the dielectric material such that the outer conductor also extends along the axis of the probe. In another variation of the probe which provides for effective outward radiation of energy or heating, a portion or portions of the outer conductor can be selectively removed. This type of construction is typically referred to as a "leaky waveguide" or "leaky coaxial" antenna. Another variation on the microwave probe involves having the tip formed in a uniform spiral pattern, such as a helix, to provide the necessary configuration for effective radiation. This variation can be used to direct energy in a particular direction, e.g., perpendicular to the axis, in a forward direction (i.e., towards the distal end of the antenna), or a combination thereof.

[0007] Invasive procedures and devices have been developed in which a microwave antenna probe may be either inserted directly into a point of treatment via a normal body orifice or percutaneously inserted. Such invasive procedures and devices potentially provide better temperature control of the tissue being treated. Because of the small difference between the temperature required for denaturing malignant cells and the temperature injurious to healthy cells, a known heating pattern and predictable temperature control is important so that heating is

confined to the tissue to be treated. For instance, hyperthermia treatment at the threshold temperature of about 41.5° C generally has little effect on most malignant growths of cells. However, at slightly elevated temperatures above the approximate range of 43° C to 45° C, thermal damage to most types of normal cells is routinely observed; accordingly, great care must be taken not to exceed these temperatures in healthy tissue.

[0008] However, many types of malignancies are difficult to reach and treat using non-invasive techniques or by using invasive antenna probes designed to be inserted into a normal body orifice, i.e., a body opening which is easily accessible. These types of conventional probes may be more flexible and may also avoid the need to separately sterilize the probe; however, they are structurally weak and typically require the use of an introducer or catheter to gain access to within the body. Moreover, the addition of introducers and catheters necessarily increase the diameter of the incision or access opening into the body thereby making the use of such probes more invasive and further increasing the probability of any complications that may arise.

[0009] Structurally stronger invasive probes exist and are typically long, narrow, needle-like antenna probes which may be inserted directly into the body tissue to directly access a site of a tumor or other malignancy. Such rigid probes generally have small diameters which aid not only in ease of use but also reduce the resulting trauma to the patient. A convenience of rigid antenna probes capable of direct insertion into tissue is that the probes may also allow for alternate additional uses given different situations. However, such rigid, needle-like probes commonly experience difficulties in failing to provide uniform patterns of radiated energy; they fail to provide uniform heating axially along and radially around an effective length of the probe; and it is difficult to otherwise control and direct the heating pattern when using such probes.

[0010] Accordingly, there remains a need for a microwave antenna probe which overcomes the problems discussed above. There also exists a need for a microwave antenna probe which is structurally robust enough for direct insertion into tissue without the need for additional introducers or catheters and which produces a controllable and predictable heating pattern.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0011] A microwave antenna assembly which is structurally robust enough for unaided direct insertion into tissue is described herein. The microwave antenna assembly is generally comprised of a radiating portion which may be connected to a feedline (or shaft) which in turn may be connected by a cable to a power generating source such as a generator. The microwave assembly may be a monopole microwave antenna assembly but is preferably a dipole assembly. The distal portion of the radiating portion preferably has a tapered end which terminates at a tip to allow for the direct insertion into tissue with minimal resistance. The proximal portion is located proximally of the distal portion, and a junction member is preferably located between both portions.

[0012] The adequate rigidity necessary for unaided direct insertion of the antenna assembly into tissue, e.g., percutaneously, preferably comes in part by a variety of different methods. Some of the methods include assembling the antenna under a pre-stressed condition prior to insertion into tissue. This may be accomplished in part by forcing an inner conductor, which runs longitudinally through the assembly, into a tensile condition by preferably affixing the inner conductor distal end to the distal radiating portion of the antenna assembly. Another method includes configuring the proximal and distal radiating portions of the antenna to mechanically fasten to each other. That is, the proximal and distal radiating portions may be configured to "screw" into one another directly or to a junction member located between the two portions and which is threaded such that the portions each screw onto the junction member separately.

[0013] Another method includes attaching the proximal and distal radiating portions together by creating overlapping or interfitting joints. In this variation, either the proximal or the distal radiating portion may be configured to create an overlapping joint by interfitting with each other through a variety of joints. For instance, the distal portion may be configured to intimately fit within a receiving cavity or channel at the distal end of the proximal portion. The two portions may also be configured to have a number of pins or conical members extending to join the two. Alternatively, the two portions may be frictionally interfitted by an interference fitted joint; or depressible/retractable projections

may be disposed on either portion to interfit with corresponding depressions in the opposite portion.

[0014] To further aid in strengthening the antenna assemblies, a variety of methods may also be used for attaching the tip or distal portion. For instance, a variation may have a distal portion which may screw onto a threaded inner conductor or another variation may have an inner conductor having an anchoring element capable of holding the inner conductor within a splittable distal portion. Furthermore, a multi-sectioned distal portion may also be utilized for first attaching an inner conductor to the distal portion and then assembling the distal portion with additional variable sections. In many of the variations described herein, it may be preferable to have a dielectric material applied as a layer or coating between the two radiating portions.

[0015] Affixing the inner conductor within the distal radiating portion may be accomplished in a variety of ways, for instance, welding, brazing, soldering, or through the use of adhesives. Forcing the inner conductor into a tensile condition helps to force the outer diameter of the antenna into a compressive state. This bi-directional stress state in turn aids in rigidizing the antenna assembly.

[0016] To enable a compressive state to exist near the outer diameter, the junction member between the distal and the proximal radiating portions in some of the variations is preferably made from a sufficiently hard dielectric material, e.g., ceramic materials. The hardness of the junction member aids in transferring the compressive forces through the antenna assembly without buckling or kinking during antenna insertion into tissue. Furthermore, materials such as ceramic generally have mechanical properties where fracturing or cracking in the material is more likely to occur under tensile loading conditions. Accordingly, placing a junction under pre-stressed conditions, particularly a junction made of ceramic, may aid in preventing mechanical failure of the junction if the antenna were to incur bending moments during insertion into tissue which could subject portions of the junction under tensile loads. The junction member may also be made into uniform or non-uniform, e.g., stepped, shapes to accommodate varying antenna assembly designs.

[0017] Moreover, to improve the energy focus of an antenna assembly, an electrical choke may also be used in any of the variations described herein to contain returning currents to the distal end of the antenna assembly. Generally, the choke may be disposed on top of a dielectric material on the antenna proximally of the radiating section. The choke is preferably comprised of a conductive layer and may be further covered by a tubing or coating to force the conductive layer to conform to the underlying antenna.

[0018] Additionally, variations on the choke, the tubing or coating, any sealant layers, as well as other layers which may be disposed over the antenna assembly may be used. Certain layers, e.g., a heatshrink layer disposed over the antenna assembly, may have wires or strands integrated within the layer to further strengthen the antenna assembly. Kevlar wires, for instances, may be integrally formed into the layer and oriented longitudinally with the antenna axis to provide additional strength.

[0019] In use, to facilitate insertion of a microwave antenna into tissue, various ablative tips may be utilized. For example, one variation may utilize an antenna which is insulated along its length except at the distal tip. The distal tip may be energized by RF energy delivered through, e.g., the inner conductor. During antenna deployment, RF energy may be applied continuously or selectively to the exposed distal tip to facilitate antenna insertion by using the RF energized tip to cut through the tissue as the antenna is advanced. Another variation may utilize an inner conductor which may be slidably disposed within a lumen through the antenna. As the antenna is advanced through the tissue, when resistance is encountered the inner conductor, which may be attached to an RF generator, may be advanced distally within the lumen to extend at least partially out of the distal tip of the antenna. RF energy may then be applied such that the energized inner conductor facilitates antenna advancement by cutting the tissue.

[0020] Any of the antenna variations described herein may be utilized in a variety of methods to effect tissue treatment. For instance, in one variation, a single antenna may be used to treat the tissue in a single location. In another variation, a single antenna may be positioned within a first region of tissue for treatment, then the antenna may be removed and repositioned in another region of tissue, and so on for any number of times and positions, until satisfactory

treatment is effected. In yet another variation, multiple antennas may be used simultaneously to effect treatment to a region of tissue. In this variation, the simultaneous use of multiple antennas may effectively create a combined treatment or ablation field which is larger than an ablation field that a single antenna used alone or sequentially may create. In yet another variation, multiple antennas may be used together but the power provided to each may be cycled between the antennas in an unlimited number of combinations through the use of multiplexing methods. Such a use may reduce the overall power of the system for treatment while effectively treating the tissue region of interest.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

- [0021] Fig. 1 shows a representative diagram of a variation of a microwave antenna assembly.
- [0022] Figs. 2A and 2B show an end view and a cross-sectional view, respectively, of a conventional dipole microwave antenna assembly.
- [0023] Fig. 3 shows an exploded cross-sectional view of a variation on a pre-stressed antenna assembly.
- [0024] Fig. 4 shows the assembled pre-stressed antenna assembly of Fig. 3 and the directions of stress loads created within the assembly.
- [0025] Fig. 5 shows another variation of pre-stressed antenna assembly having a sharpened distal tip.
- [0026] Fig. 6 shows an exploded cross-sectional view of another variation on pre-stressed antenna assembly having a non-uniform junction member.
- [0027] Fig. 7 shows an exploded cross-sectional view of yet another variation on pre-stressed antenna assembly having an access channel defined along the side of the antenna.
- [0028] Fig. 8 shows a pre-stressed monopole variation of a microwave antenna assembly.
- [0029] Fig. 9A shows a side view of another variation on a pre-stressed antenna assembly having an electrical choke.
- [0030] Fig. 9B shows a cross-sectional view of the assembly of Fig. 9A.
- [0031] Fig. 10 shows a detailed view of a variation on the radiating portion of Fig. 9B.

[0032] Fig. 11 shows a detailed view of a variation on the transition from the radiating portion to the electrical choke of Fig. 9B.

[0033] Fig. 12 shows a detailed view of a variation on the different layers within the electrical choke of Fig. 9B.

[0034] Fig. 13 shows a detailed view of a variation on the feedline of Fig. 9B.

[0035] Fig. 14 shows an isometric view of a sectioned antenna assembly having a layer, such as a heatshrink layer, formed with wires or strands longitudinally orientated within the layer.

[0036] Fig. 15 shows an exploded cross-sectional side view of a variation of the microwave antenna assembly having a mechanically threaded interface.

[0037] Fig. 16 shows an exploded cross-sectional side view of another variation of the antenna assembly also having a mechanically threaded interface.

[0038] Fig. 17 shows a cross-sectional side view of a crimped or overlapping variation of the antenna assembly.

[0039] Fig. 18 shows a cross-sectional side view of an antenna assembly where the proximal portion may be configured to receive and hold the distal portion in an overlapping joint.

[0040] Fig. 19 shows an exploded cross-sectional side view of a variation of the antenna assembly having an interfitting joint with an overlapping junction member.

[0041] Fig. 20 shows a cross-sectional side view of an antenna assembly with two variations on the distal portion joint for interfitting with the proximal portion.

[0042] Figs. 21A and 21B show the corresponding end views of the proximal portion from Fig. 20 with two variations for interfitting with the distal portions.

[0043] Fig. 22 shows an exploded cross-sectional side view of another variation where the antenna may be assembled using overlapping interference-fitted joints.

[0044] Fig. 23 shows another variation in an exploded cross-sectional side view of an antenna assembled via a junction member and multiple pins.

[0045] Fig. 24 shows an exploded cross-sectional side view of another variation in which the distal portion may have a plurality of projections which interfit with corresponding depressions within the proximal portion.

[0046] Fig. 25 shows another variation in which the projections and their corresponding interfitting depressions may have corresponding access channels defined in the proximal portion through which the distal portion may be welded, soldered, brazed, or adhesively affixed to the proximal portion.

[0047] Fig. 26 shows a side view of a variation on attaching the distal portion to the inner conductor by a screw-on method.

[0048] Fig. 27 shows an isometric exploded view of another variation on attaching the distal portion by anchoring the inner conductor within a splittable distal portion.

[0049] Fig. 28 shows an exploded side view of a multi-sectioned distal portion variation.

[0050] Fig. 29 shows a cross-sectioned side view of an alternative distal portion having an arcuate or curved sloping face to facilitate antenna assembly as well as entry into tissue.

[0051] Fig. 30 shows an assembled cross-sectional side view of a representative antenna assembly having a constant diameter over the proximal and distal portions.

[0052] Fig. 31 shows the antenna of Fig. 30 but with the distal portion having a diameter larger than the diameter of the proximal portion.

[0053] Fig. 32 shows the antenna of Fig. 30 but with the distal portion having a diameter smaller than the diameter of the proximal portion.

[0054] Fig. 33 shows an antenna variation which may be used with RF energy to facilitate insertion into tissue or to cut through obstructive tissue.

[0055] Figs. 34A and 34B show another variation which may also be used to deliver RF energy.

[0056] Figs. 35A and 35B show an isometric and end view, respectively, of one variation in using a single antenna.

[0057] Figs. 36A and 36B show an isometric and end view, respectively, of another variation in using a single antenna in multiple positions.

[0058] Figs. 37A and 37B show an isometric and end view, respectively, of yet another variation in using multiple antennas in multiple positions.

[0059] Fig. 38 shows a schematic illustration of a variation for a channel splitter assembly for creating multiple channels using a single source.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0060] In invasively treating diseased areas of tissue in a patient, trauma may be caused to the patient resulting in pain and other complications. Various microwave antenna assemblies, as described herein, are less traumatic than devices currently available and as described in further detail below, methods of manufacturing such devices are also described. Generally, an apparatus of the present invention allows for the direct insertion of a microwave antenna into tissue for the purposes of diagnosis and treatment of disease. Fig. 1 shows a representative diagram of a variation of a microwave antenna assembly 10 of the present invention. The antenna assembly 10 is generally comprised of radiating portion 12 which may be connected by feedline 14 (or shaft) via cable 15 to connector 16, which may further connect the assembly 10 to a power generating source 28, e.g., a generator. Assembly 10, as shown, is a dipole microwave antenna assembly, but other antenna assemblies, e.g., monopole or leaky wave antenna assemblies, may also utilize the principles set forth herein. Distal portion 20 of radiating portion 12 preferably has a tapered end 24 which terminates at a tip 26 to allow for insertion into tissue with minimal resistance. In those cases where the radiating portion 12 is inserted into a pre-existing opening, tip 26 may be rounded or flat.

[0061] In some applications a microwave antenna requires adequate structural strength to prevent bending of the antenna, e.g., where the antenna is directly inserted into tissue, where the antenna undergoes bending moments after insertion, etc. Accordingly, there are various configurations to increase the antenna strength without compromising desirable radiative properties and the manufacturability of such an antenna. One configuration involves placing the antenna assembly under a compressive load to stiffen the radiating portions. Another configuration involves mechanically fastening, e.g., in a screw-like manner, the radiating portions together to provide a joint which will withstand

bending moments. A further configuration may also involve creating overlapping joints between the radiating portions of the antenna assembly to provide a high-strength antenna. Furthermore, alternate configurations of attaching a distal tip or distal radiating portion to an antenna may be utilized to further increase the antenna strength.

Antenna Assembly Via Compression

[0062] Generally, the antenna assembly 10 in Fig. 1 shows a variation where a compressive load may be used to increase antenna strength. Proximal portion 22 is located proximally of distal portion 20, and junction member 18 is preferably located between both portions such that a compressive force is applied by distal and proximal portions 20, 22 upon junction member 18. Placing distal and proximal portions 20, 22 in a pre-stressed condition prior to insertion into tissue enables assembly 10 to maintain a stiffness that is sufficient to allow for unaided insertion into the tissue while maintaining a minimal antenna diameter, as described in detail below.

[0063] Feedline 14 may electrically connect antenna assembly 10 via cable 15 to generator 28 and usually comprises a coaxial cable made of a conductive metal which may be semi-rigid or flexible. Feedline 14 may also have a variable length from a proximal end of radiating portion 12 to a distal end of cable 15 ranging between about 1 to 10 inches. Most feedlines may be constructed of copper, gold, or other conductive metals with similar conductivity values, but feedline 14 is preferably made of stainless steel. The metals may also be plated with other materials, e.g., other conductive materials, to improve their properties, e.g., to improve conductivity or decrease energy loss, etc. A feedline 14, such as one made of stainless steel, preferably has an impedance of about 50 Ω and to improve its conductivity, the stainless steel may be coated with a layer of a conductive material such as copper or gold. Although stainless steel may not offer the same conductivity as other metals, it does offer strength required to puncture tissue and/or skin.

[0064] Fig. 2A and 2B show an end view and a cross-sectional view, respectively, of a conventional dipole microwave antenna assembly 30. As seen, antenna assembly 30 has a proximal end 32 which may be connected to a feedline

14, as further discussed herein, and terminates at distal end 34. The radiating portion of antenna 30 comprises proximal radiating portion 36 and distal radiating portion 38. Proximal radiating portion 36 may typically have an outer conductor 42 and an inner conductor 44, each of which extends along a longitudinal axis. Between the outer and inner conductors 42, 44 is typically a dielectric material 46 which is also disposed longitudinally between the conductors 42, 44 to electrically separate them. A dielectric material may constitute any number of appropriate materials, including air. Distal portion 48 is also made from a conductive material, as discussed below. Proximal and distal radiating portions 36, 38 align at junction 40, which is typically made of a dielectric material, e.g., adhesives, and are also supported by inner conductor 44 which runs through junction opening 50 and at least partially through distal portion 48. However, as discussed above, the construction of conventional antenna assembly 30 is structurally weak at junction 40.

[0065] In operation, microwave energy having a wavelength, λ , is transmitted through antenna assembly 30 along both proximal and distal radiating portions 36, 38. This energy is then radiated into the surrounding medium, e.g., tissue. The length of the antenna for efficient radiation may be dependent at least on the effective wavelength, λ_{eff} , which is dependent upon the dielectric properties of the medium being radiated into. Energy from the antenna assembly 30 radiates and the surrounding medium is subsequently heated. An antenna assembly 30 through which microwave energy is transmitted at a wavelength, λ , may have differing effective wavelengths, λ_{eff} , depending upon the surrounding medium, e.g., liver tissue, as opposed to, e.g., breast tissue. Also affecting the effective wavelength, λ_{eff} , are coatings which may be disposed over antenna assembly 30, as discussed further below.

[0066] Fig. 3 shows an exploded cross-sectional view of a variation on pre-stressed antenna assembly 60 made at least in part according to the present invention. In making antenna assembly 60, junction member 62 may be placed about inner conductor 44 through junction opening 64. Distal portion 48 may be placed over inner conductor 44 and then compressed such that junction member 62 is placed under a compressive load generated between proximal radiating portion 36 and distal radiating portion 38 to create pre-stressed antenna assembly

70, as shown in Fig. 4. Antenna assembly 70 may have an overall length of about 1.42 inches and an outer diameter of about 0.091 inches. The pre-stressed loading condition on antenna assembly 70 preferably exists when assembly 70 is under a state of zero external stress, that is, when assembly 70 is not acted upon by any external forces, e.g., contact with tissue, external bending moments, etc.

[0067] The compression load is preferably first created by feeding distal portion 48 over inner conductor 44 until junction member 62 is under compression, then inner conductor 44 is preferably affixed to distal portion 48 to maintain the compression load on junction member 62. Some clearance may be necessary between junction member 62 and inner conductor 44 to avoid any interference resistance between the two. Inner conductor 44 may be affixed to distal portion 48 along interface 72 by a variety of methods, such as welding, brazing, soldering, or by use of adhesives. The compression loading occurs such that while inner conductor 44 is placed under tension along direction 76, distal portion 48 places the outer portions of junction member 62 under compression along directions 74. Inner conductor 44 may be heated prior to affixing it to distal portion 48 by any number of methods because heating inner conductor 44 may expand the conductor in a longitudinal direction (depending upon the coefficient of thermal expansion of the inner conductor 44).

[0068] For example, heating inner conductor 44 may be accomplished during the welding or soldering procedure. Upon cooling, inner conductor 44 may contract accordingly and impart a tensile force upon the conductor 44 while simultaneously pulling junction member 62 into compression. To allow the compression loading to transfer efficiently through assembly 70, junction member 62 is preferably made of a dielectric material which has a sufficiently high compressive strength and high elastic modulus, i.e., resistant to elastic or plastic deformation under a compression load. Therefore, junction member 62 is preferably made from materials such as ceramics, e.g., Al_2O_3 , Boron Nitride, stabilized Zirconia, etc. Alternatively, a junction member 62 made of a metal and sufficiently coated with a dielectric or polymer may be used, provided the dielectric coating is sufficiently thick to provide adequate insulation. To prevent energy from conducting directly into the tissue during use, a dielectric layer having a thickness between about 0.0001 to 0.003 inches, may be coated directly

over antenna assembly 70. The dielectric coating may increase the radiated energy and is preferably made from a ceramic material, such as Al_2O_3 , TiO_2 , etc., and may also be optionally further coated with a lubricious material such as Teflon, polytetrafluoroethylene (PTFE), or fluorinated ethylene propylene (FEP), etc. In addition to the dielectric coating, a sealant layer may also be coated either directly over the antenna assembly 70, or preferably over the dielectric layer to provide a lubricious surface for facilitating insertion into a patient as well as to prevent tissue from sticking to the antenna assembly 70. The sealant layer may be any variety of polymer, but is preferably a thermoplastic polymer and may have a thickness varying from a few angstroms to as thick as necessary for the application at hand. Varying these coating thicknesses over antenna assembly 70 may vary the effective wavelengths, λ_{eff} , of the radiation being transmitted by the antenna. Thus, one may vary the coating thicknesses over the assembly 70 to achieve a predetermined effective wavelength depending upon the desired results.

[0069] Fig. 5 shows another variation of pre-stressed antenna assembly 80. This variation also has proximal radiating portion 82 attached to distal radiating portion 84 with junction member 86 therebetween under a compression load, as described above. Proximal radiating portion 82 may have outer conductor 88 and inner conductor 92 extending longitudinally with dielectric material 90 disposed in-between conductors 88, 92. However, this variation shows distal end 94 having distal radiating portion 84 with tapered end 96 terminating at tip 98, which is preferably sharpened to allow for easy insertion into tissue. A preferable method of optimizing the amount of radiated energy from assembly 80 may include adjusting the length of proximal radiating portion 82 to correspond to a length of $\lambda/4$ of the radiation being transmitted through assembly 80, and likewise adjusting a cumulative (or overall) length of distal radiating portion 84 and junction 86 to also correspond to a length of $\lambda/4$. Adjusting the lengths of proximal and distal radiating portions 82, 84 to correspond to the wavelength of the transmitted microwaves may be done to optimize the amount of radiated energy and accordingly, the amount of the medium or tissue which is subsequently heated. The actual lengths of proximal and distal radiating portions 82, 84 may, of course, vary and is not constrained to meet a $\lambda/4$ length. When antenna assembly 80 is radiating energy, the ablation field is variable 3-

dimensionally and may be roughly spherical or ellipsoid and centers on junction 86 and extends to the ends of the proximal and distal radiating portions 82, 84, respectively.

[0070] The location of tip 98 may be proportional to a distance of $\lambda/4$ of the radiation being transmitted through assembly 80, but because tip 98 terminates at tapered end 96, the angled surface of taper 96 may be taken into account. Thus, the total distance along the outer surfaces of assembly 80 from B to C plus the distance from C to D may accord to the distance of $\lambda/4$. The length of proximal radiating portion 82, i.e., the distance along the outer surface of assembly 80 from A to B, may also accord to the distance of $\lambda/4$, as above. Although it is preferable to have the length of the radiating portion of the antenna accord with a distance of the wavelength, λ , it is not necessary for operation of the device, as described above. That is, an antenna assembly having a radiating portion with a length in accordance with a first wavelength may generally still be used for transmitting radiation having a second wavelength, or third wavelength, or so on, although with a possible reduction in efficiency.

[0071] Fig. 6 shows an exploded cross-sectional view of another variation on pre-stressed antenna assembly 100. Assembly 100 shows a variation of junction member 102 which has a radial thickness which is non-uniform about a longitudinal axis as defined by junction member 102. The proximal portion is comprised of outer conductor 110, inner conductor 112, dielectric material 114, as above. However, junction 102 is shown in this variation as a stepped member having at least two different radiuses. In other variations, the junction may be curved or have multiple steps. Central radius 104 of junction member 102 is shown as having a diameter similar to that of outer conductor 110 and distal portion 120. Stepped radius 106, which is preferably smaller than central radius 104, may be symmetrically disposed both proximally and distally of central radius 104. To accommodate stepped junction member 102 during the assembly of antenna 100, receiving cavity 116 may be made in dielectric material 114 and receiving cavity 118 may be made in distal portion 120 to allow for the interfitting of the respective parts. Such a stepped design may allow for the compression load to be concentrated longitudinally upon the central radius 104 of junction member 102 to allow for the efficient transfer of the load along the proximal portion.

[0072] In addition to stepped junction member 102, Fig. 6 also shows channel 122 extending longitudinally from distal tip 124 to receiving cavity 118. Once inner conductor 112 may be placed through junction opening 108 and into distal portion 120, either partially or entirely therethrough, channel 122 may allow for access to inner conductor 112 for the purpose of affixing it to distal portion 120. Affixing inner conductor 112 may be done to place it under tension by any of the methods as described above, such as welding or soldering.

[0073] However, having channel 122 extend from the distal tip 124 to inner conductor 112 may limit the sharpness of tip 124. Accordingly, variation 130 in Fig. 7 shows an alternate distal end 132 which defines channel 138 for receiving inner conductor 92 but which also defines access channel 140 extending from a side surface of distal end 132 to channel 138. Access channel 140 allows for access to inner conductor 92 to affix it to distal end 132 while allowing for tapered end 134 to terminate at sharpened tip 136. Although a single channel is shown in this variation, multiple channels may be incorporated into the design at various locations.

[0074] While most of the variations described above are related to dipole antenna assemblies, Fig. 8 shows monopole antenna assembly 150 made at least in part according to the present invention. As shown, there may be a single radiating portion 152 which preferably has a length corresponding to a length of $\lambda/2$, rather than $\lambda/4$, of the radiation being transmitted through assembly 150. As above, monopole assembly 150 may apply a compressive load upon junction member 154 between radiating portion 152 and proximal end 156. The principles of having an antenna length correspond to a length of $\lambda/2$ or $\lambda/4$, as well as having tapered distal ends or tips on the distal portion, may be utilized not only with antennas assembled using compression methods, but these principles may be used with any of the variations described herein.

[0075] To improve the energy focus of an antenna assembly, an electrical choke may also be used to contain returning currents to the distal end of the antenna. Generally, the choke may be disposed on the antenna proximally of the radiating section. The choke is preferably placed over a dielectric material which may be disposed over the antenna. The choke is preferably a conductive layer and may be further covered by a tubing or coating to force the conductive layer to

conform to the underlying antenna, thereby forcing an electrical connection (or short) more distally and closer to the radiating section. The electrical connection between the choke and the underlying antenna may also be achieved by other connection methods such as soldering, welding, brazing, crimping, use of conductive adhesives, etc. The following description is directed towards the use of a choke on a compression antenna variation for illustration purposes only; however, the choke may also be used with any of the antenna variations described below.

[0076] Fig. 9A shows a side view of a variation on pre-stressed antenna assembly 160 with an electrical choke and Fig. 9B shows cross-sectioned side view 9B-9B from Fig. 9A. Similar to the antenna assemblies above, assembly 160 shows radiating portion 162 electrically attached via feedline (or shaft) 164 to a proximally located coupler 166. Detail 174 of radiating portion 162 and detail 180 of feedline 164 are described in further detail below. Radiating portion 162 is shown with sealant layer 168 coated over section 162. Electrical choke 172 is shown partially disposed over a distal section of feedline 164 to form electrical choke portion 170, which is preferably located proximally of radiating portion 162. Details 176, 178 of choke portion 170 are described in further detail below.

[0077] Fig. 10 shows detailed view 174 from Fig. 9B of a variation on a pre-stressed antenna section. As seen, distal radiating portion 190 and proximal radiating portion 192 are located in their respective positions about junction member 194, which in this variation is shown as a stepped member. Proximal radiating portion 192 is further shown having outer conductor 196 preferably disposed concentrically about inner conductor 198 with dielectric 200 placed in-between outer and inner conductors 196, 198 for insulation. Inner conductor 198 may be fed through junction member 194 and into distal radiating portion 190 to be affixed by weld or solder 202 to distal radiating portion 190 via access channel 204, which is shown to extend from a distal end of inner conductor 198 to an outer surface of portion 190. As described above, inner conductor 198 may be heated to longitudinally expand it prior to affixing it to distal portion 190. As inner conductor 198 cools, a tensile force is imparted in inner conductor 198 which draws the distal and proximal portions 190, 192 together longitudinally. In turn, this imparts a compressive force upon the radial portions of junction member

194, preferably at the junction-to-distal portion interface 206. Optionally, dielectric layer 208, which may be a ceramic material such as Al_2O_3 , may be coated over the radiating antenna portion. Moreover, a lubricious layer such as Teflon, may also be coated over the antenna portion as well along with dielectric layer 208. A further sealant layer 210 may optionally be coated over dielectric layer 208 as well. Sealant layer 210 may be made from a variety of thermoplastic polymers, e.g., heat shrink polymers, such as polyethylene (PE), polyethylene terephthalate (PET), polytetrafluoroethylene (PTFE), fluorinated ethylene propylene (FEP), perfluoroalkoxy (PFA), chlorotrifluoroethylene (CTFE), ethylene chlorotrifluoroethylene (ECTFE), and ethylene tetrafluoroethylene (ETFE). The description is directed towards the use of dielectric and sealant layers on a compression antenna variation for illustration purposes only; however, the uses of dielectric and sealant layers may also be used with any of the antenna variations described below.

[0078] Fig. 11 shows detailed view 176 from Fig. 9B of a variation on the transition to electrical choke portion 170. Electrical choke 172 may be disposed proximally of sealant layer 210 or proximal radiating portion 192. Although shown with a gap between choke 172 and sealant layer 210 in this variation, the two may touch or overlap slightly. Fig. 12 shows a more detailed view 178 of the various layers which may comprise electrical choke 172. In this variation, a first inner dielectric layer 220 may be disposed over the antenna assembly. The first inner dielectric layer 220 may be made from any of the various thermoplastic polymers, ceramics, or other coatings, as described above. A second inner dielectric layer 222 may optionally be disposed over first inner dielectric layer 220 and may be made from the same or similar material as first inner dielectric layer 220. Conductive layer 224 may then be disposed over the dielectric layers. Conductive layer 224 is preferably a conductive coating, a conductive foil material, e.g., copper foil, or a metal tubing and electrically contacts outer conductor 196 at some location along choke 172 proximally of radiating portion 162.

[0079] Variation 160 illustrates electrical contact between conductive layer 224 and outer conductor 196 in detail 178 occurring at the proximal location of electrical choke portion 170, but choke 172 may be formed without forcing

contact between outer conductor 196 with layer 224 provided the length of choke 172 is chosen appropriately. For instance, choke 172 having a sufficiently long length, e.g., a length of $\lambda/2$, may be used without having to force contact between the layers. Outer dielectric layer 226 may be disposed upon conductive layer 224. Outer dielectric layer 226 may also be made of any of the various polymers as described above and is preferably a heat shrinkable layer that may force conductive layer 224 to conform more closely to the underlying layers to not only force a better electrical connection, but also to reduce the overall diameter of the antenna section. Fig. 13 shows detailed view 180 from Fig. 9B of a variation on the feedline. As shown, feedline 164 may be a simple coaxial cable where outer conductor 196, inner conductor 198, and dielectric 200 extend throughout the feedline. Outer dielectric layer 226 may also extend down over feedline 164 and even over the entire antenna assembly.

[0080] Further steps may optionally be taken to further increase the strength of an antenna assembly by altering any of the layers, such as sealant layer 210 or any of the other heatshrink layers discussed above. Fig. 14 shows one example of antenna section 230 where wires or strands 236 may be formed within or on the layers 232 to add strength. The wires 236 may be formed within the layer 232 and are preferably orientated longitudinally along the length of antenna section 230 such that the bending strength of the antenna is increased. The layers 232 may be formed over outer conductor 234, as described above, and wire 236 may be made of any high-strength material, e.g., Kevlar, metals, etc. Metal wires may be used provided they are well insulated by layers 232.

Antenna Assembly Via Mechanical Fastening

[0081] Aside from using a compressive load to increase antenna strength, as described above, alternative methods may be employed for increasing antenna strength to withstand direct insertion into tissue. An alternative variation may include assembling an antenna using mechanical fastening methods. Fig. 15, for example, shows a cross-sectioned variation of a mechanically threaded interface or "screw-on" variation 240 as an exploded assembly. As seen, proximal portion 242 may be connected to distal portion 244 by using a junction member 246 having first and second junction mating sections 252, 254, respectively.

[0082] Junction member 246 is preferably comprised of any of the dielectric materials as described above. Alternatively, a dielectric coating or layer may also be applied to the inside of channels 248, 260 which contacts junction member 246. First and second mating sections 252, 254 may be threaded 256, 258, respectively, such that the thread pitch on each section 252, 254 is opposed to each other, i.e., the pitch angle of threading 256 may be opposite to the pitch angle of threading 258. Alternatively, the thread pitch on each section 252, 254 may be configured to be angled similarly for ease of antenna assembly. Proximal portion 242 may have a receiving cavity or channel 248 which is threaded 250 at a predetermined pitch to correspond to the pitch and angle of the threading 256 on first mating section 252. Likewise, distal portion 244 may have a receiving cavity or channel 260 which is threaded 262 at a predetermined pitch to correspond to the pitch and angle of the threading 258 on second mating section 254. Having opposed pitch angles may be done to ensure a secure fit or joint when variation 240 is assembled by screwing proximal portion 242 and distal portion 244 together onto junction member 246.

[0083] A further screw-on variation 270 is shown in Fig. 16. Here, proximal portion 272 may have a proximal mating section 274 which is threaded 276 at a predetermined pitch and angle to correspondingly screw into distal portion 282 via threaded receiving channel 278. Channel 278 preferably has threading 280 which matches threading 276 on mating section 274 to ensure a tight fit and a secure joint. Although variation 270 shows a mating section 274 on proximal portion 272 and receiving channel 278 in distal portion 282, a mating section may instead be located on distal portion 282 for insertion into a corresponding receiving channel located in proximal portion 272. Preferably, a dielectric coating or layer 284 is applied either to the inside of channel 278 or on the outer surface of mating section 274 as shown (or upon both) to prevent contact between proximal and distal portions 272, 282, respectively.

Antenna Assembly Via Overlap

[0084] Another variation on assembling an antenna is by use of overlapping or interfitting joints to attach proximal and distal portions together. Fig. 17 shows a crimped or overlapping variation 290. Proximal portion 292 is

preferably attached to distal tip or portion 294 by inner conductor 302 and by having a distal end section of the proximal portion 292 crimped and portion 294 maintained in position via a molded material 300, which is also preferably dielectric such as a biocompatible thermoset plastic or polymer (including any of the dielectric materials discussed herein). The distal end section, i.e., crimped dielectric 296 and crimped outer conductor 298, is preferably crimped or tapered in a reduced diameter towards the distal end while a portion of dielectric 296 near crimped outer conductor 298 may be partially removed to allow for material 300 to be formed within, as shown in the figure. While the inner conductor 302 is held between proximal and distal portions 292, 294, respectively, the moldable material 300 may be injection molded within a die or preform holding the assembly to form a unitary structure with both portions 292, 294. Material 300 may also be shaped into various forms depending upon the desired application, such as a tapering distal end, as shown in the Fig. 17.

[0085] Fig. 18 shows another variation 310 where proximal portion 312 is preferably configured to receive and hold distal portion 314. Proximal portion 312 may have a distal section of dielectric material 316 removed partially to create a receiving channel 318 within portion 312. Distal portion 314 may be snugly placed within this channel 318 such that portion 314 is partially within and partially out of dielectric material 316, as shown. A layer 320 of the dielectric material 316 may be left between outer conductor 322 and distal portion 314 to form an insulative barrier between the two. Alternatively, dielectric layer 320 may be formed of a different material than dielectric 316. To further aid in antenna 310 insertion into tissue, the distal end of distal portion 314, as well as the distal end of outer conductor 322, may be tapered to facilitate insertion. The overlapping segment between proximal and distal portions 312, 314, respectively, may be varied depending upon the desired bending resistance and desired strength of antenna 310.

[0086] Fig. 19 shows a further variation 330 of an overlapping joint for assembling the antenna. Proximal portion 332 preferably has a mating channel 340 in the distal end of the portion 332 for receiving mating section 338 of distal portion 334. This variation 330 preferably has an overlapping junction member 336 which may be slipped over mating section 338 prior to insertion into channel

340. Overlapping junction member **336** is preferably a dielectric material and fits snugly between proximal portion **332** and mating section **338** to form an overlapping joint when the inner conductor is attached to distal portion **334**, as described above.

[0087] Fig. 20 shows an antenna variation where different methods of overlapping attachments may be utilized. Distal portion **350** is shown having a cylindrical interfitting member **358**. The portion **350** may be inserted via member **358** into a corresponding receiving channel **356** preferably defined in the outer conductor of proximal portion **354**. An end view of proximal portion **354** in Fig. 21A shows channel **356** in this variation for receiving a cylindrically shaped member **358**.

[0088] Another variation is shown in distal portion **352** where rather than having a conical interfitting member, separate pins or dowels **360** may be used to extend into receiving channels **356'** of proximal portion **354'**. These pins **360** may be integral with distal portion **352** or they may be separate members inserted and held in distal portion **352**; in either case, pins **360** are preferably made of a hard dielectric material or a metal sufficiently coated with a dielectric material for insulation. As seen in Fig. 21B, which is an end view of proximal portion **354'**, channels **356'** are shown located every 90° about portion **354'**. Although four pins are used in this variation, any number of pins may be used ranging from two to several depending upon the desired strength of the antenna assembly. To support such a plurality of pins, it may be desirable to have proximal portions **354**, **354'** with an outer conductor having a thickness ranging from 0.005 to 0.010 inches.

[0089] Fig. 22 shows an antenna assembly with an overlapping interference-fitted variation **370**. As seen, proximal portion **372** may be attached to distal portion **374** by a junction member **376** which is preferably interference-fitted, i.e., frictionally-fitted, between both portions **372**, **374**. The junction member **376** may have a first and a second section **382**, **384**, respectively, which preferably has a diameter D_2 . Receiving channel **378** in proximal portion **372** preferably has a diameter D_1 and receiving channel **380** in distal portion **374** also has a diameter D_1 or some diameter less than D_2 . Accordingly, diameter D_1 is some value less than D_2 such that an interference fit is created between junction

376 and portions 372 and 374. Accordingly, distal portion 374 is frictionally held to proximal portion 372.

[0090] Fig. 23 shows another interfitting variation 390 utilizing a junction member 396 which is preferably held between proximal portion 392 and distal portion 394 by multiple pins 398, 402 which may be received in channels 400, 404, respectively. Accordingly, as discussed above, any number of pins 398 extending from proximal portion 392 may be inserted into corresponding channels 400, and any number of pins 402 extending from distal portion 394 may likewise be inserted into corresponding channels 404.

[0091] Fig. 24 shows an overlapping and interfitting variation 410 where proximal portion 412 has receiving channel 416 for receiving distal portion 414. Within channel 416, there may be a plurality of depressions 418 defined in the surface of the outer conductor. These depressions 418 are preferably shaped to have a locking configuration, such as a right triangle shape, when projections 420, which are located radially on distal portion 414, are inserted into and mated to depressions 418. Projections 420 are preferably protrusions which extend from a surface of distal portion 414 and are preferably radially disposed on the outer surface. Also, any number of projections 420, e.g., at least two to several, may be utilized but are preferably equally radially spaced from one another depending upon the desired strength of the overlapping joint. To facilitate insertion of distal portion 414 into channel 416, projections 420 may be disposed on the ends of a number of corresponding support members 422 flexibly attached to distal portion 414. Support members 422 would allow projections 420 to be retracted at least partially into the outer surface of distal portion 414 during insertion, and when distal portion 414 is fully inserted into channel 416, projections 420 may then be allowed to expand into and intimately mate with the depressions 418 such that distal portion 414 is held fixed relative to proximal portion 412. A dielectric material may be coated or sprayed within channel 416 or on distal portion 414 to insulate between the two portions 412, 414.

[0092] Fig. 25 shows a further variation 430 of that shown in Fig. 24. Proximal portion 432 may be attached to distal portion 434 by an overlapping joint where mating section 438 on distal portion 434 may be inserted into receiving channel 436. Once inserted, distal portion 434 may be held to proximal

portion 432 by projections 442 intimately mating within corresponding depressions 444. Distal portion 434 may be made entirely of a dielectric material; alternatively, mating section 438 may be made at least partly of a dielectric while the remainder of distal portion 434 may be metallic. To further ensure a strong joint, depressions 444 may have a number of access channels 440 preferably extending radially from depressions 444 defined in the surface of channel 436 to an outer surface of proximal portion 432. Access channels 440 may be used to provide access to projections 442 (once mated within depressions 444) for further fixation to proximal portion 432 by welding, soldering, brazing, or by applying adhesives.

Alternate Methods of Tip or Distal Portion Attachment

[0093] Aside from various methods of assembling microwave antennas, there are also a variety of methods for attaching the tip or distal radiating portion to a remainder of the assembly. The various methods described below may be used in any of the assembly variations discussed herein depending upon the desired antenna assembly characteristics.

[0094] Fig. 26 shows a partial assembly of a microwave antenna having a distal portion 454 which may be screwed onto the proximal portion 452 via the inner conductor 456. The distal end portion of inner conductor 456 is preferably threaded 458 on an outer surface. Correspondingly, the receiving channel 460 within distal portion 454 is likewise threaded to receive the threaded portion 458 of inner conductor 456. During assembly, distal portion 454 may be screwed onto proximal portion 452 by inner conductor 458. Accordingly, the force with which the proximal and distal portions 452, 454 are held together may be varied by the amount and degree distal portion 454 is screwed or advanced onto inner conductor 456, thereby allowing the rigidity or strength of the antenna to be varied according to a desired use or application. In this variation, distal portion 454 may be made of a non-metallic material, e.g., a polymer, and attached directly to proximal portion 452; alternatively, distal portion 454 may also be made of a metallic material and used in conjunction with a dielectric junction member, as described above.

[0095] Fig. 27 shows another variation for assembling a distal portion in an isometric exploded view of splittable distal portion 470. The distal portion 470 may be comprised of a splittable distal portion having a first half 472 and a second half 474. Although shown split into two halves 472, 474, distal portion 470 may be split into numerous portions, e.g., three or more. Within the adjoining surfaces, anchoring channel 476 may be defined to receive inner conductor 480 and may have a portion of channel 476 configured or enlarged to receive an anchoring element 482 for holding the inner conductor 480 distal end within distal portion 470. Inner conductor 480 preferably has an anchoring element 482 formed on a distal end of inner conductor 480 by rounding or flattening the distal end into anchoring element 482 or attaching a separate anchoring mechanism onto the distal end. Once inner conductor 480 and anchoring element 482 are positioned within anchoring channel 476, both halves 472, 474 may be attached together, thereby fixedly holding anchoring element 482 therewithin. When distal portion halves 472, 474 are attached to one another, they may be aligned and positioned relative to each other by a number of alignment projections 478 on one or both halves 472, 474 and the halves may then be held to one another by any number of methods, e.g., welding, brazing, soldering, adhesives, snap-fits, etc.

[0096] Another variation for attaching the distal portion is shown in Fig. 28, which is an exploded side view of multi-sectioned portion 490. The distal portion may be comprised of multiple sections which may be interfitted to form the distal portion. Thus, while proximal portion 492 and junction member 494 (which may or may not be used in this variation) are assembled as in some of the other variations, the distal portion may have a first section 496 through which inner conductor 506 may be passed through via access channel 502. Once the distal tip of inner conductor 506 is passed through junction member 494 and access channel 502, it may then be attached to first section 496 at the end of access channel 502 by any of the attachment methods described above. First section 496 may then be assembled with second section 498 by interfitting mating section 500 into receiving channel 504. The use of a multi-sectioned portion such as that shown in portion 490 may enable one to first attach the proximal portion with the distal portion and variably alter the tip of the distal portion according to a desired application.

[0097] To further aid in tip or distal portion attachment to the antenna assembly, various distal portions may be used to facilitate assembly and use in a patient. As previously described, the distal tip is preferably tapered and terminates at a tip to facilitate antenna insertion into tissue with minimal resistance. Also, attaching the inner conductor to the distal portion may be facilitated by an access channel defined in the distal portion so that the inner conductor may be attached by welding, soldering, etc. within the distal portion. To further facilitate this assembly process, the distal tip may be formed into an arcuate or curved face terminating into a tip, as seen in Fig. 29. As shown in the cross-sectional side view of alternate tip 510, it may have the arcuate or curved face 512 sloping distally such that tip 514 is formed off-center from the longitudinal axis defined by the antenna to which alternate tip 510 may be attached. Accordingly, inner conductor 518 may be routed through access channel 516 and then attached by any of the methods described to alternate tip 510 thereby allowing tip 514 to be sharpened as necessary and allowing an access channel 516 to be maintained along the longitudinal axis of the antenna for ease of assembly.

Alternate Distal Portion Attachments

[0098] As discussed above, the energy with a wavelength, λ , is transmitted down a microwave antenna and is subsequently radiated into the surrounding medium. In operation, microwave energy having a wavelength, λ , is transmitted through the antenna assembly along both proximal and distal radiating portions. This energy is then radiated into the surrounding medium. The length of the antenna for efficient radiation may be dependent at least on the effective wavelength, λ_{eff} , which is dependent upon the dielectric properties of the medium being radiated into. Energy having the effective wavelength radiates and the surrounding medium is subsequently heated. An antenna assembly through which microwave energy is transmitted at a wavelength, λ , may have differing effective wavelengths, λ_{eff} , depending upon whether the energy is radiated into, e.g., liver tissue, as opposed to, e.g., breast tissue. Also affecting the effective wavelength, λ_{eff} , are coatings which may be disposed over the antenna assembly.

[0099] Accordingly, various distal portions having varying diameters are shown in Figs. 30 to 32. Fig. 30, for instance, shows a representative antenna 520 having a constant diameter from proximal portion 522 to distal portion 524 while covered with an optional heatshrink 526, as described above, for comparison purposes. Fig. 31 shows antenna 530 having distal portion 532 with a larger diameter than proximal portion 522. Heatshrink 526 in this variation may be desirable to smooth the transition between the different diameters. On the other hand, Fig. 32 shows antenna 540 having distal portion 542 with a diameter that is smaller than that of proximal portion 522. Having heatshrink 526 in this variation may also be desirable to likewise smooth the transition between the different diameters. Varying the diameters of the distal portion may change the radiative properties of the effective wavelength in addition to the different medium types being radiated into. Accordingly, the diameter of the distal portion may be varied to give a desired radiative effect for different tissue types. Besides the diameter of the distal portion, the thicknesses of heatshrink 526 or any of the other dielectric and sealant layers, as described above, may also be varied accordingly in addition to the distal portion diameter. Although only two variations are shown in Figs. 31 and 32, the distal tips may have a variety of configurations; for instance, it may be stepped, ramped, tapered, etc., depending upon the desired radiative effects.

Antenna Deployment

[0100] As described above, the microwave antenna may be inserted directly into the tissue and into the lesion to be treated. However, during insertion, the antenna may encounter resistance from some areas of tissue, particularly in some tissue found, e.g., in the breast. When the microwave antenna encounters resistance, if force were applied, tissue damage may result or the target tissue may be inadvertently pushed away due to the differential density of the target tissue relative to the surrounding tissue. Therefore, RF energy may also be utilized with the microwave antenna for facilitating deployment within the tissue.

[0101] In use, the RF energy may be simply left on the entire time the antenna is advanced through the tissue, or it may be applied or turned on only as needed as the antenna encounters resistance from the tissue. With the RF energy

activated, the antenna may be further advanced utilizing the RF energy to cut through the obstructive tissue. Once the antenna has been desirably positioned within a lesion or region of tissue, the RF energy, if on, may be switched off and the microwave energy may be switched on to effect treatment.

[0102] One variation of antenna assembly 550 is shown in Fig. 33. Assembly 550 may use RF energy at the distal tip of the antenna as a cutting mechanism during antenna deployment. The microwave antenna 552 is preferably covered with some insulative material 554 along most of its length, but distal tip 556 may be uninsulated such that the RF energy may be applied thereto through the inner conductor. To utilize the RF energy cutting mechanism at the distal tip, the inner conductor may be made from Nitinol, Tungsten, stainless steel, or some other conductive metal.

[0103] Antenna 552, through cable 558, may be electrically connected to an RF generator 564 which provides the RF energy to distal tip 556 during placement and positioning of antenna 552 within the tissue or lesion. After antenna 552 has been desirably positioned within the lesion, connector 560 may be disconnected from RF cable 562 and attached to a microwave generator 568 via microwave cable 566 to provide the microwave energy for effecting treatment to the tissue.

[0104] Alternatively, given the small amount of surface area of distal tip 556, a low power RF generator may be utilized and can be built into an integral unit 568 along with the microwave generator. Alternatively, the optional RF generator 564 may be physically separated from the microwave generator and may be electrically connected as a separate unit, as shown.

[0105] Another variation on antenna assemblies utilizing RF energy is shown in Figs. 34A and 34B. In this variation, antenna assembly 570 may have antenna body 572 define a lumen 574 therethrough within which inner conductor 576 may be slidingly positioned. During insertion of the antenna into the tissue, distal tip 578 may be used to pierce through the tissue, as seen in Fig. 34A. When resistance is encountered, inner conductor 576 may be advanced distally through lumen 574 to extend at least partially out of distal tip 578. To facilitate movement of inner conductor 576 within antenna 572, the inner surface of lumen 576 may be coated with a lubricious material or the outer surface of inner conductor 576 may

alternatively be coated. If inner conductor 576 is coated, a distal end portion of inner conductor 576 may be left exposed such that RF energy may be delivered through the inner conductor 576 at this exposed end. To optimize the microwave radiation transmitted from antenna assembly 570, electrical choke 573 may be disposed partially over antenna body 572, as shown. Electrical choke 573 may be made and utilized in any of the variations as described in detail above.

[0106] Aside from the illustrations of possible antenna deployment methods and devices described above, other variations for deployment and insertion into tissue may be utilized. Potential other methods and devices for antenna deployment and insertion may be found in co-pending U.S. Patent Application entitled "Microwave Antenna Having A Curved Configuration" filed September 15, 2002, which is commonly owned and is incorporated herein by reference in its entirety.

Methods of Use

[0107] In using a microwave antenna, several different methods may be utilized. Fig. 35A shows an isometric view of one variation 580 in which a single antenna 582 may be utilized within the tissue. Fig. 35B shows an end view of the antenna 582 and an example of a possible resulting ablation field or region 584 using that single antenna 582. In such a case, antenna 582 may be positioned directly within the tissue to be treated.

[0108] Figs. 36A and 36B show another variation 590 in which a single antenna 592 may be positioned in one of several locations 592' and/or 592" about the tissue to be treated. Antenna 592 may be activated in a first position, then removed and repositioned in a second position 592' and activated, and then removed and again repositioned in a third position 592" and again activated, and so on. The order of positioning, relative placement, and depth of insertion of the antenna may be sequential or varied, and the number of times the antenna is positioned or repositioned within the tissue may also be varied depending upon the desired ablation effects. This example shows antenna 592 being positioned three times for illustrative purposes but the invention is not so limited. Fig. 36B shows an end view of the overall resulting ablation field 594 due to the overlapping individual ablation fields.

[0109] Another variation for antenna use is shown in Figs. 37A and 37B. This variation shows antenna assembly 600 in which multiple antennas may be utilized in combination with one another. This example shows first, second, and third antennas 602, 604, 606, respectively, which may be used simultaneously, although any number of antennas may be used depending upon the desired ablation effects. Additionally, antennas 602, 604, 606 are shown in this example positioned in a triangular pattern; however, any variety of patterns may be utilized depending upon the number of antennas used and the desired ablation effects. In this variation, all three antennas 602, 604, 606 may be turned on simultaneously to effect an overall larger ablation region. Fig. 37B shows an end view of an example of a combined ablation field 608 which may result when all antennas are on simultaneously. As seen, the individual antennas may combine to form a larger and more uniform ablation field 608.

[0110] In using multiple antennas simultaneously, the energy supplied to the antennas may alternatively be cycled or pulsed to effect a combined ablation field. Rather than using antennas 602, 604, 606 turned on simultaneously, they may instead be energized cyclically through the use of multiple channels from a single unit by multiplexing and cycling the output. This may eliminate the use of multiple generators since each antenna would typically require the use of a generator. The effects of multiple channel generators, which typically requires the use of multiple generators, may be accomplished by using a single generator and may result in a much lower power consumption. For instance, a three channel 100 W generator system would otherwise require about three times the power, i.e., 300 W, if used by a single channel system if the power were produced for each channel simultaneously.

[0111] Fig. 38 schematically shows channel splitter assembly 610 which may be used to create multiple channels by using a single source with multiplexing. A single microwave generator module 618 having, e.g., a 100 W output, may create a single channel A. The single channel A may be switched between several separate channel outputs A_1 to A_N created by channel splitter 612. Any number of multiple outputs may be used depending upon the desired number of channels and the desired effects. In use, the output may be cycled through the range of outputs 616 through multiple channels A_1 to A_N or in any other manner

depending upon the ablation field to be created. Moreover, the rate of cycling may range anywhere from several microseconds to several seconds over a treatment period of several minutes or longer.

[0112] Controller 614, which is preferably in electrical communication with channel splitter 612 may be used for several purposes. It may be used to control the cycling rate as well as the order of channels in which the output is cycled through. Moreover, controller 614 may be an automatic system or set by the technician or physician. An automatic system may be configured to detect the electrical connection to the antenna and to control the delivery of the energy to the antenna. The detection may be achieved by either a passive or active component in the system which may monitor reflections from the antenna to determine whether a proper connection is present. A controller set by the technician or physician may be configured to require manual initiation for energy delivery to begin.

[0113] The applications of the antenna assemblies and methods of making the assemblies discussed above are not limited to microwave antennas used for hyperthermic, ablation, and coagulation treatments but may include any number of further microwave antenna applications. Modification of the above-described assemblies and methods for carrying out the invention, and variations of aspects of the invention that are obvious to those of skill in the art are intended to be within the scope of the claims.

CLAIMS

We claim:

1. A microwave antenna assembly for applying microwave energy therapy comprising:
 - a proximal portion having an inner conductor and an outer conductor, each extending therethrough, the inner conductor disposed within the outer conductor;
 - and
 - a distal portion attached to the proximal portion such that the inner conductor extends at least partially therein,wherein each of the proximal and distal portions are configured to mate together such that the proximal and distal portions are fixedly positioned relative to one another by a mechanically engaging joint coupling the distal portion to the proximal portion.
2. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 1 further comprising a junction member disposed between the proximal and distal portions.
3. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 2 wherein the junction member comprises a dielectric material.
4. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 1 wherein the distal portion has a tapered distal end.
5. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 1 wherein the proximal and distal portions are adapted to radiate upon transmission of radiation through the antenna assembly.
6. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 5 wherein the proximal and distal portions have a length which is proportional to an effective wavelength of the radiation transmitted by the antenna assembly.
7. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 1 wherein the distal portion comprises a metal or dielectric material.

8. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 1 wherein the distal portion is attached to the inner conductor by a method selected from the group consisting of welding, brazing, soldering, and adhesives.

9. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 1 further comprising a dielectric coating disposed at least partially over the antenna assembly.

10. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 9 wherein the dielectric coating comprises a ceramic.

11. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 1 further comprising a sealant coating disposed at least partially over the antenna assembly.

12. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 1 further comprising a conductive layer which is located proximally of the distal portion and is in electrical communication with the outer conductor.

13. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 1 further comprising a dielectric material disposed between the proximal and distal portions.

14. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 1 wherein the distal portion comprises at least a first section which interfits with a second section in a mated joint such that the first and the second section forms an integral distal portion.

15. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 1 wherein the mechanically engaging joint comprises a threaded interface.

16. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 15 wherein the threaded interface comprises a junction member having a threaded distal and proximal section.

17. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 1 wherein the mechanically engaging joint comprises an interference-fit between each of the portions.

18. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 1 wherein the mechanically engaging joint comprises a plurality of pins extending between the portions.

19. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 1 wherein the mechanically engaging joint comprises a plurality of projections radially disposed about the proximal or distal portion.

20. A kit for applying microwave energy therapy comprising:
a microwave antenna assembly as described in claim 1; and
a power source for supplying power to the microwave antenna assembly.

21. The kit of claim 20 wherein the power source comprises a generator.

22. A microwave antenna assembly for applying microwave energy therapy comprising:

a proximal portion having an inner conductor and an outer conductor, each extending therethrough, the inner conductor disposed within the outer conductor;
and

a distal portion attached to the proximal portion such that the inner conductor extends at least partially therein,

wherein each of the proximal and distal portions are configured to mate together such that the proximal and distal portions are fixedly positioned relative to one another by attachment means coupling the distal portion to the proximal portion.

23. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 22 wherein the attachment means comprises a threaded interface.

24. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 22 wherein the attachment means comprises an interference-fit between each of the portions.

25. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 22 wherein the attachment means comprises a plurality of pins extending between the portions.

26. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 22 wherein the attachment means comprises a plurality of projections radially disposed about the proximal or distal portion.

27. A microwave antenna assembly for applying microwave energy therapy comprising:

a proximal portion having an inner conductor and an outer conductor, each extending therethrough, the inner conductor disposed within the outer conductor;

a junction member having a longitudinal thickness and disposed distally of the proximal portion such that the inner conductor extends therethrough; and

a distal portion disposed distally of the junction member such that the inner conductor extends at least partially therein, and

wherein the distal portion and proximal portion apply a compressive force on at least a portion of the junction member.

28. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 27 wherein the proximal portion has a length corresponding to a distance of one-quarter wavelength of radiation transmittable through the antenna assembly.

29. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 27 wherein the proximal portion is adapted to radiate along the length upon transmission of the radiation.

30. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 27 wherein the junction member comprises a dielectric material.

31. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 27 wherein the junction member has a radial thickness which is uniform about a longitudinal axis as defined by the junction member.

32. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 27 wherein the junction member has a radial thickness which is non-uniform about a longitudinal axis as defined by the junction member.

33. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 32 wherein the junction member is stepped such that the member comprises at least two different radial thicknesses.

34. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 27 wherein the distal portion has a tapered distal end.

35. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 27 wherein the distal portion has an actual length defined along an outer surface of the distal portion such that a cumulative distance of the actual length and the thickness of the junction member corresponds to a distance of one-quarter wavelength of radiation transmittable through the antenna assembly.

36. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 27 wherein the distal portion comprises a metal.

37. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 27 wherein the inner conductor extends through the distal portion.

38. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 27 wherein the distal portion defines a channel extending from the inner conductor disposed within the distal portion to an outer surface of the distal portion.

39. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 27 wherein the distal portion is attached to the inner conductor by a method selected from the group consisting of welding, brazing, soldering, and adhesives.

40. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 27 wherein when the antenna is under a state of zero external stress, the inner conductor is in a state of tension and is attached to the distal portion such that the distal portion applies the compressive force against the junction member.

41. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 27 further comprising a dielectric coating disposed at least partially over the antenna assembly.

42. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 27 further comprising a sealant coating disposed at least partially over the antenna assembly.

43. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 42 wherein the sealant coating comprises a thermoplastic polymer.

44. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 27 further comprising a conductive layer which is located proximally of the distal portion and is in electrical communication with the outer conductor.

45. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 44 wherein the conductive layer is selected from the group consisting of conductive coatings, metallic foil, and metal tubing.

46. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 44 further comprising a first dielectric layer disposed at least partially between the conductive layer and the proximal portion.

47. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 46 further comprising a second dielectric layer disposed at least partially about the conductive layer.

48. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 44 wherein the conductive layer is disposed at least partially about a coaxial feedline connecting the antenna assembly to a generator.

49. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 48 further comprising a dielectric layer disposed between the conductive layer and the proximal portion.

50. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 27 wherein the distal portion has an actual length defined along an outer surface of the distal portion such that the actual length corresponds to a distance of one-half wavelength of radiation transmittable through the antenna assembly.

51. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 50 wherein the inner conductor is in a state of tension and is attached to the distal portion such that the distal portion applies the compressive force against the junction member.

52. A method of manufacturing a microwave antenna assembly for applying microwave energy therapy, comprising:

providing a proximal portion having an inner conductor and an outer conductor, each extending therethrough, the inner conductor disposed within the outer conductor;

placing a junction member adjacent to a distal end of the proximal portion such that the inner conductor extends through a channel defined in the junction member;

placing a proximal end of a distal portion adjacent to a distal end of the junction member such that the inner conductor extends within a channel defined within the distal portion; and

affixing the inner conductor to the distal portion such that the proximal portion and the distal portion apply a compressive force on at least a portion of the junction member.

53. The method of claim 52 further comprising heating the inner conductor prior to affixing the inner conductor to the distal portion.

54. The method of claim 53 wherein affixing the inner conductor to the distal portion comprises a method selected from the group consisting of welding, brazing, and soldering the inner conductor to the distal portion.

55. The method of claim 52 wherein the proximal portion comprises a dielectric material disposed between the inner conductor and the outer conductor.

56. The method of claim 52 wherein the proximal portion has a length corresponding to a distance of one-quarter wavelength of radiation transmittable through the antenna assembly.

57. The method of claim 52 wherein the junction member comprises a dielectric material.

58. The method of claim 57 wherein the junction member comprises a ceramic material.

59. The method of claim 52 wherein the distal portion has an actual length defined along an outer surface of the distal portion such that a cumulative distance of the actual length and a thickness of the junction member corresponds to a distance of one-quarter wavelength of radiation transmittable through the antenna assembly.

60. The method of claim 59 wherein the distal portion, the proximal portion, and the junction member are adapted to radiate along the cumulative length upon transmission of the radiation.

61. The method of claim 52 further comprising affixing the inner conductor to the distal portion such that the inner conductor is attached to the distal portion such that the inner conductor is under tension.

62. The method of claim 52 further comprising disposing a dielectric coating at least partially over the antenna assembly.

63. The method of claim 52 further comprising disposing a sealant coating at least partially over the antenna assembly.

64. The method of claim 52 further comprising disposing a conductive layer on the antenna assembly proximally of the distal portion such that the conductive layer is in electrical communication with the outer conductor.

65. A microwave antenna assembly for applying microwave energy therapy comprising:

a proximal portion having an inner conductor and an outer conductor, each extending therethrough, the inner conductor disposed within the outer conductor; and

a distal portion attached to the proximal portion such that the inner conductor extends at least partially therein,

wherein the proximal and distal portions are mated together by a mechanically threaded interface, each of the portions having a threaded surface wherein the threaded surfaces are mateable.

66. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 65 further comprising a junction member having a threaded distal and proximal section and being positionable between the proximal and distal portions.

67. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 65 wherein the proximal portion comprises a threaded distal section and the distal portion comprises a threaded proximal section, wherein the threaded proximal section comprising male threads are configured to receive the threaded distal section comprising female threads.

68. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 65 wherein the proximal portion comprises a threaded distal section and the distal portion comprises a

threaded proximal section, wherein the threaded distal section comprising male threads are configured to receive the threaded proximal section comprising female threads.

69. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 66 wherein the junction member comprises a dielectric material.

70. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 65 wherein the distal portion has a tapered distal end.

71. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 65 further comprising a dielectric coating disposed at least partially over the antenna assembly.

72. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 65 further comprising a sealant coating disposed at least partially over the antenna assembly.

73. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 65 further comprising a dielectric material disposed between the proximal and distal portions.

74. A kit for applying microwave energy therapy comprising:
a microwave antenna assembly as described in claim 65; and
a power source for supplying power to the microwave antenna assembly.

75. The kit of claim 74 wherein the power source comprises a generator.

76. A microwave antenna assembly for applying microwave energy therapy comprising:

a proximal portion having an inner conductor and an outer conductor, each extending therethrough, the inner conductor disposed within the outer conductor;
and

a distal portion attached to the proximal portion such that the inner conductor extends at least partially therein,

wherein the proximal and distal portions are mated together by a mechanically overlapping joint.

77. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 76 wherein the proximal portion is configured to receive and frictionally hold a proximal end of the distal portion.

78. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 76 wherein the distal portion is configured to receive and frictionally hold a distal end of the proximal portion.

79. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 76 wherein the overlapping joint comprises a plurality of pins extending between the proximal and distal portions, each of the proximal and distal portions defining a plurality of corresponding holes for respectively receiving the plurality of pins.

80. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 76 wherein the distal portion comprises a plurality of projections radially disposed on an outer surface of the distal portion, and wherein the proximal portion comprises a plurality of depressions radially defined in an inner surface of the proximal portion, the plurality of projections being configured to intimately mate with the plurality of depressions such that the distal portion is held fixed relative to the proximal portion.

81. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 80 wherein the plurality of projections are configured to retract at least partially into the outer surface during insertion of the distal portion into the proximal portion.

82. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 80 wherein the proximal portion further defines a plurality of channels extending radially from the plurality of depressions defined in the inner surface to an outer surface of the proximal portion.

83. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 76 further comprising a dielectric material disposed between the proximal and distal portions.

84. A kit for applying microwave energy therapy comprising:
a microwave antenna assembly as described in claim 76; and
a power source for supplying power to the microwave antenna assembly.

85. The kit of claim 84 wherein the power source comprises a generator.

86. A method for delivering microwave energy therapy comprising:
positioning a first microwave antenna in a first position in or near a region of tissue to be treated;

positioning at least a second microwave antenna in a second position in or near the region of tissue to be treated;

applying microwave energy to the first and second microwave antennas such that a combined ablation region is created about the antennas for treating the region of tissue.

87. The method of claim 86 further comprising providing a first microwave antenna prior to positioning the antenna, the first microwave antenna comprising a proximal portion having an inner conductor and an outer conductor, each extending therethrough, the inner conductor disposed within the outer conductor; and a distal portion attached to the proximal portion such that the inner conductor extends at least partially therein, wherein each of the proximal and distal portions are configured to mate together such that the proximal and distal portions are fixedly positioned relative to one another by a mechanically engaging joint coupling the distal portion to the proximal portion.

88. The method of claim 86 further comprising positioning a plurality of additional microwave antennas in or near the region of tissue to be treated prior to applying the microwave energy.

89. The method of claim 88 wherein the plurality of additional microwave antennas are positioned in a triangular pattern in or near the region of tissue to be treated.

90. The method of claim 86 wherein applying microwave energy comprises simultaneously applying microwave energy to the first and second microwave antennas.

91. The method of claim 86 wherein applying microwave energy comprises sequentially applying microwave energy to the first and second microwave antennas.

92. The method of claim 91 wherein the microwave energy is applied sequentially via a channel splitter in electrical communication with a microwave energy generator.

93. The method of claim 91 further comprising cycling the microwave energy between at least the first and second microwave antennas.

94. The method of claim 86 wherein positioning the first microwave antenna comprises applying RF energy to a distal end of the first microwave antenna.

95. The method of claim 86 wherein positioning at least the second microwave antenna comprises applying RF energy to a distal end of at least the second microwave antenna.

96. The method of claim 86 wherein at least the second microwave antenna is positioned parallel to the first microwave antenna.

97. A microwave antenna system for applying microwave energy therapy comprising:

at least one microwave antenna comprising a proximal portion having an inner conductor and an outer conductor, each extending therethrough, the inner conductor disposed within the outer conductor, and a distal portion attached to the proximal portion such that the inner conductor extends at least partially therein;

an energy generator in communication with a proximal end of the microwave antenna; and

a channel splitter in electrical communication with the microwave energy generator, wherein the channel splitter is adapted to create multiple channels from a single channel received from the energy generator.

98. The system of claim 97 further comprising a controller in electrical communication with the channel splitter for controlling a cycling rate of the channel splitter.

99. The system of claim 98 wherein the controller is further adapted to detect whether an electrical connection to the antenna is present.

100. The system of claim 97 wherein the energy generator comprises a microwave energy generator.

101. The system of claim 97 wherein the energy generator comprises an RF energy generator.

102. The system of claim 97 wherein the distal portion has an insulative coating over at least a majority of the distal portion and wherein a distal tip is uncovered by the insulative coating.

103. The system of claim 97 wherein the inner conductor is slidably disposed within the outer conductor such that a distal portion of the inner conductor is distally extendable past the distal portion.

104. The system of claim 97 wherein each of the proximal and distal portions are configured to mate together such that the proximal and distal portions are fixedly positioned relative to one another by a mechanically engaging joint coupling the distal portion to the proximal portion.

105. A microwave antenna system for applying microwave energy therapy comprising:

at least one microwave antenna comprising an inner conductor and an outer conductor,

wherein the inner conductor is disposed within the outer conductor such that the inner conductor extends at least partially therewithin and is slidingly disposed such that a distal portion of the inner conductor is distally extendable past the outer conductor while applying energy to the distal portion.

106. The system of claim 105 further comprising an energy generator in communication with a proximal end of the microwave antenna.

107. The system of claim 106 wherein the energy generator comprises a microwave energy generator.

108. The system of claim 106 wherein the energy generator comprises an RF energy generator.

109. The system of claim 108 wherein the energy applied to the distal portion of the inner conductor comprises RF energy.

110. The system of claim 106 further comprising a channel splitter in electrical communication with the energy generator, wherein the channel splitter is adapted to create multiple channels from a single channel received from the energy generator.

111. The system of claim 110 further comprising a controller in electrical communication with the channel splitter for controlling a cycling rate of the channel splitter.

112. The system of claim 111 wherein the controller is further adapted to detect whether an electrical connection to the antenna is present.

113. The system of claim 105 further comprising a choke disposed at least partially over the outer conductor.

114. The system of claim 105 wherein the inner conductor has an insulative coating over at least a majority of the inner conductor and wherein a distal tip of the inner conductor is uncovered by the insulative coating.

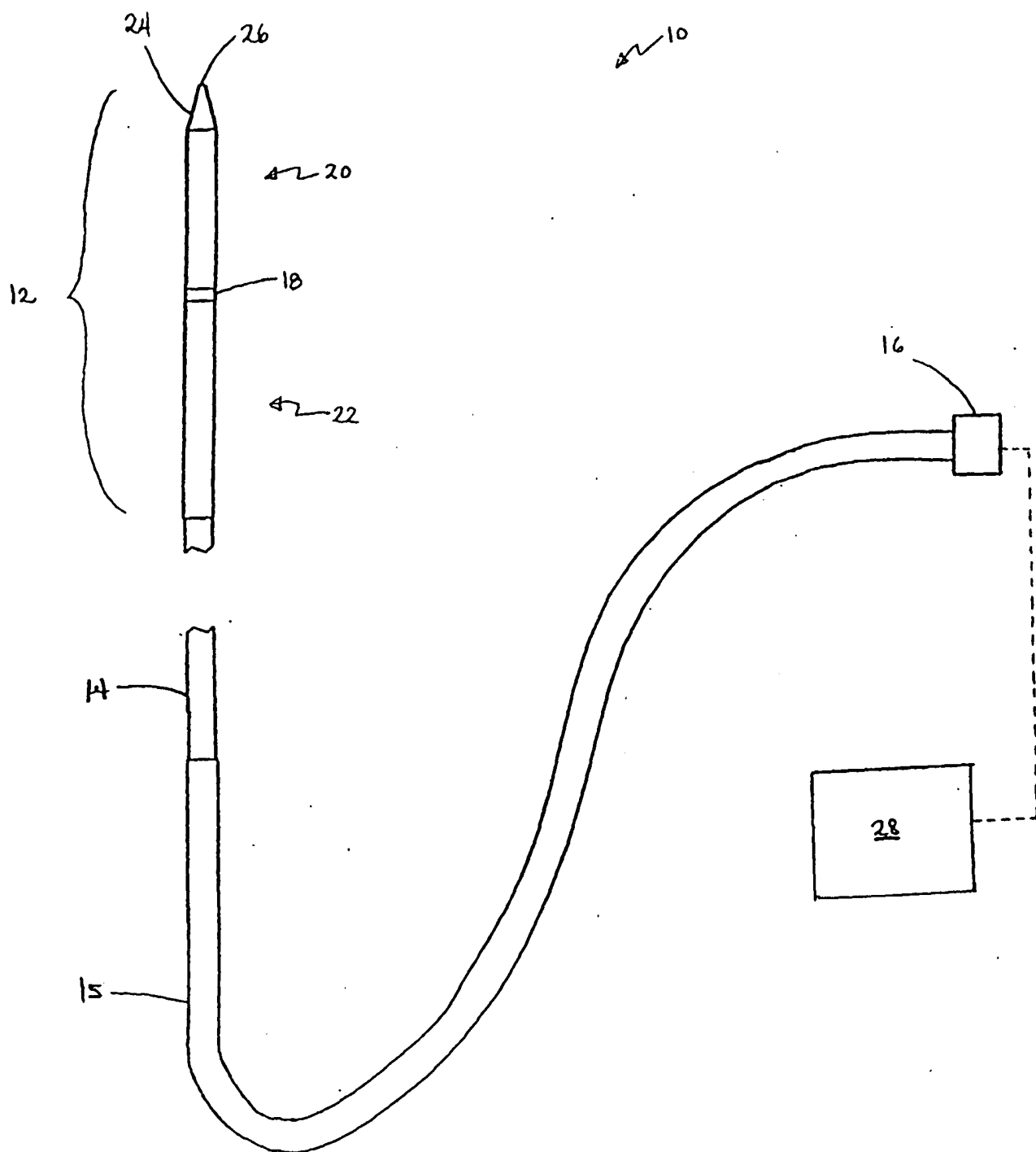


FIG. 1

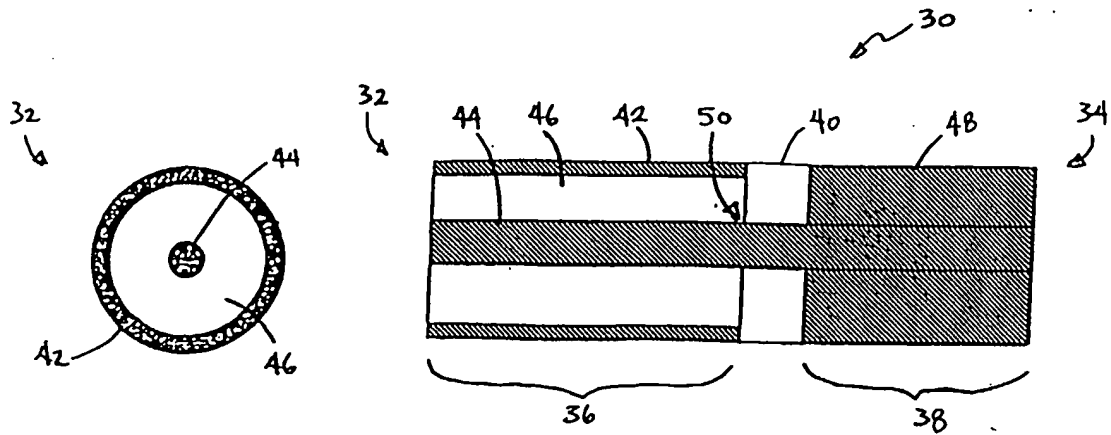


FIG. 2A

FIG. 2B

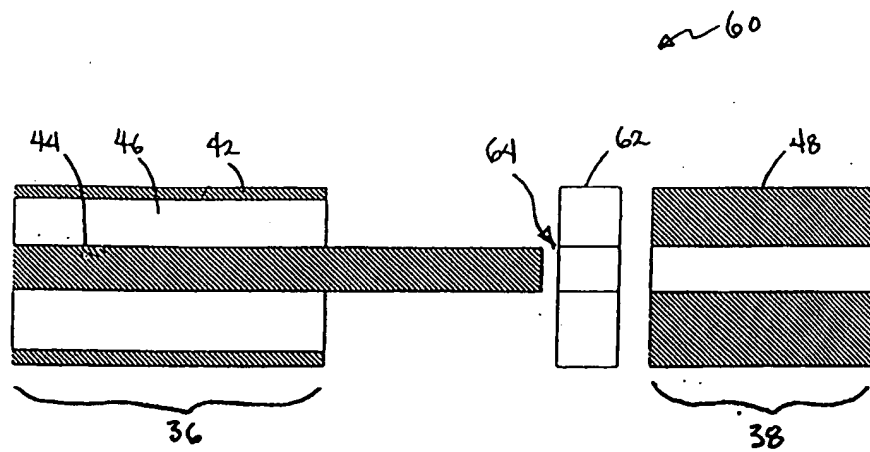


FIG. 3

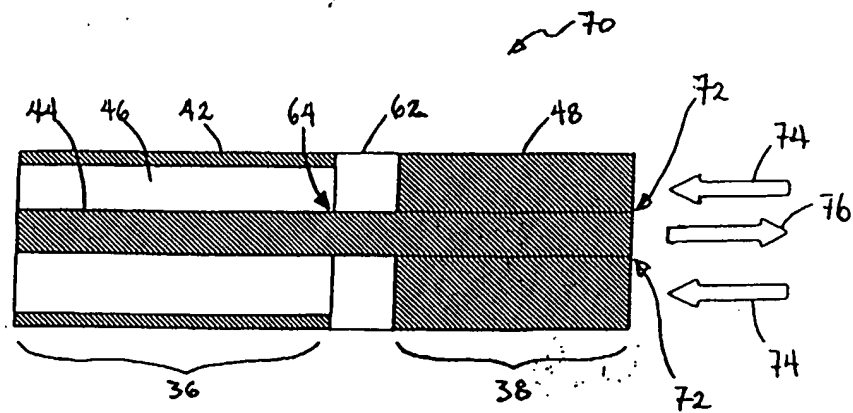


FIG. 4

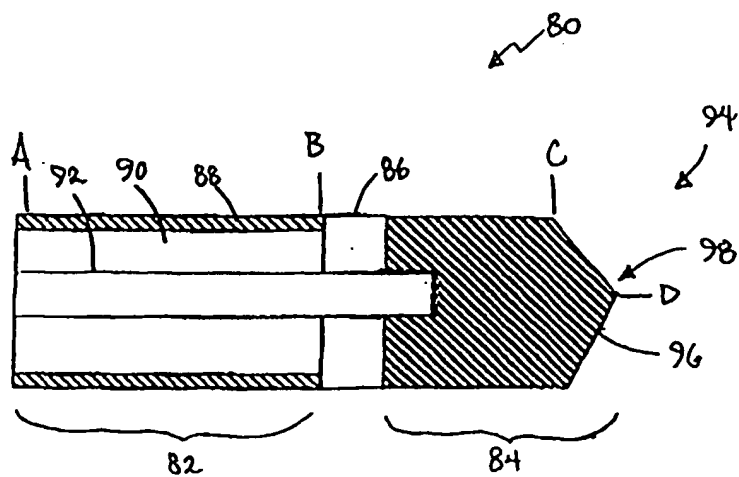


FIG. 5

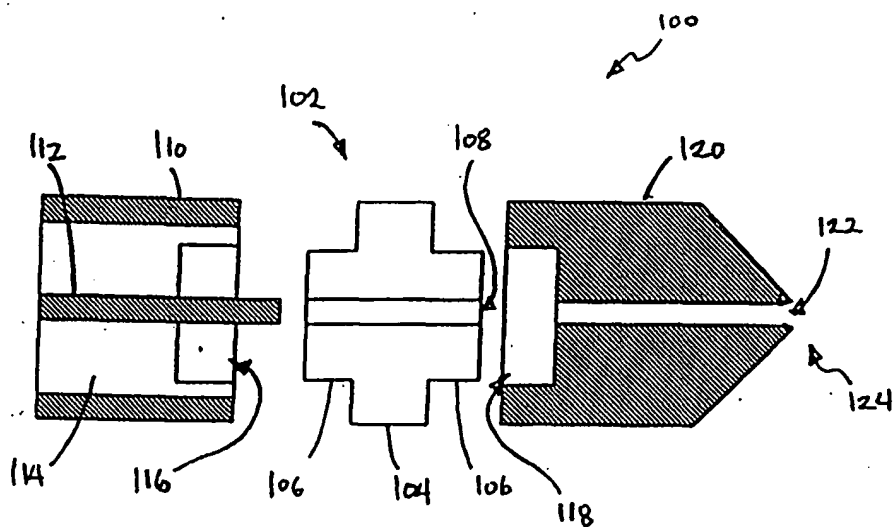


FIG. 6

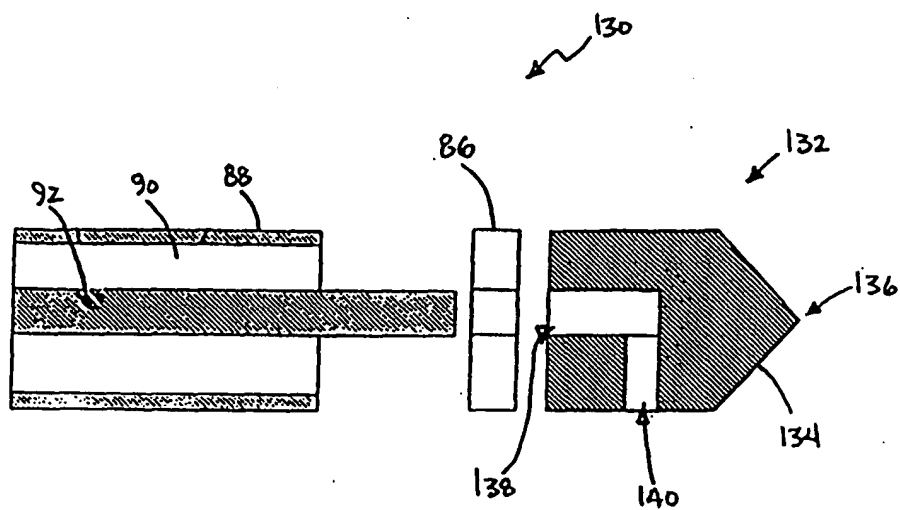


FIG. 7

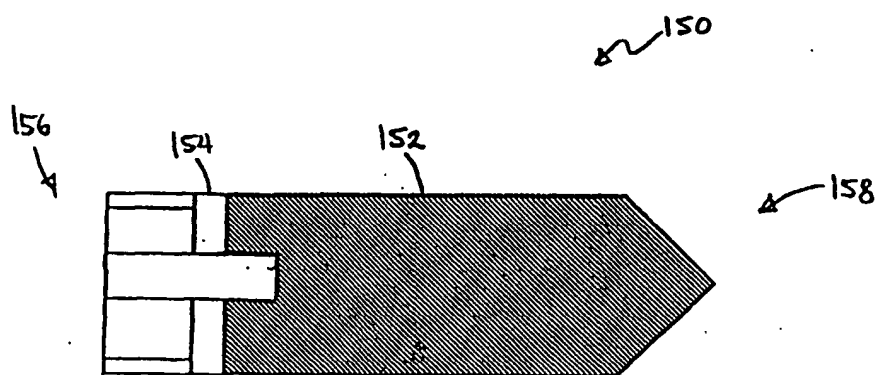
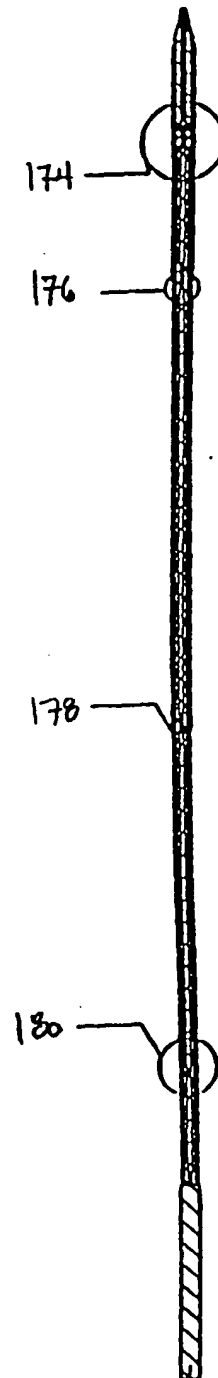
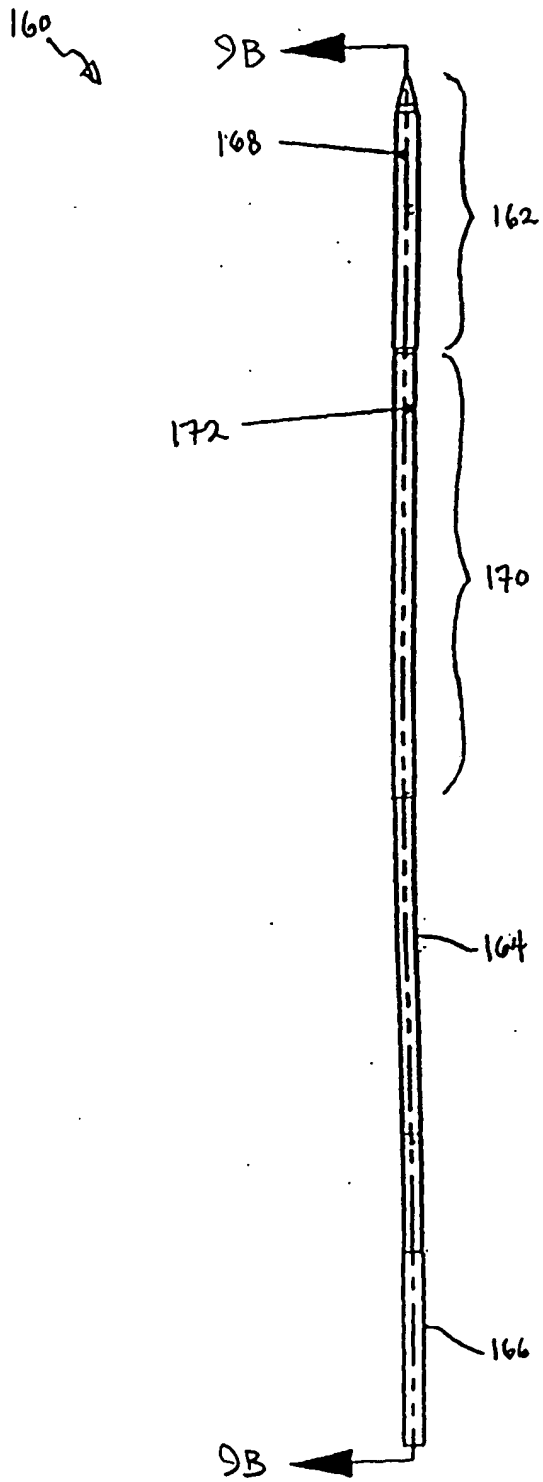


FIG. 8



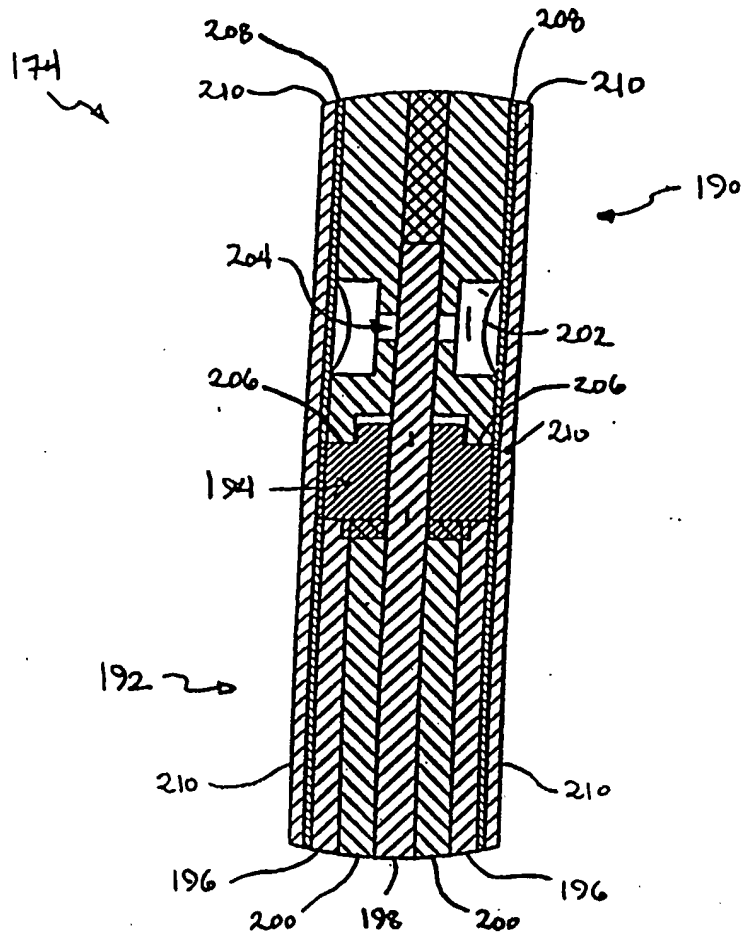


FIG. 10

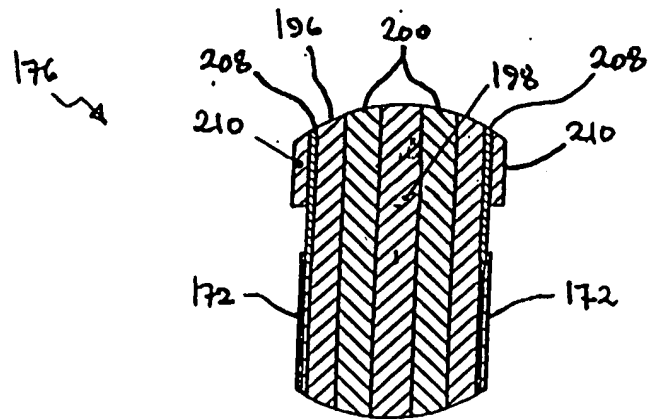


FIG. 11

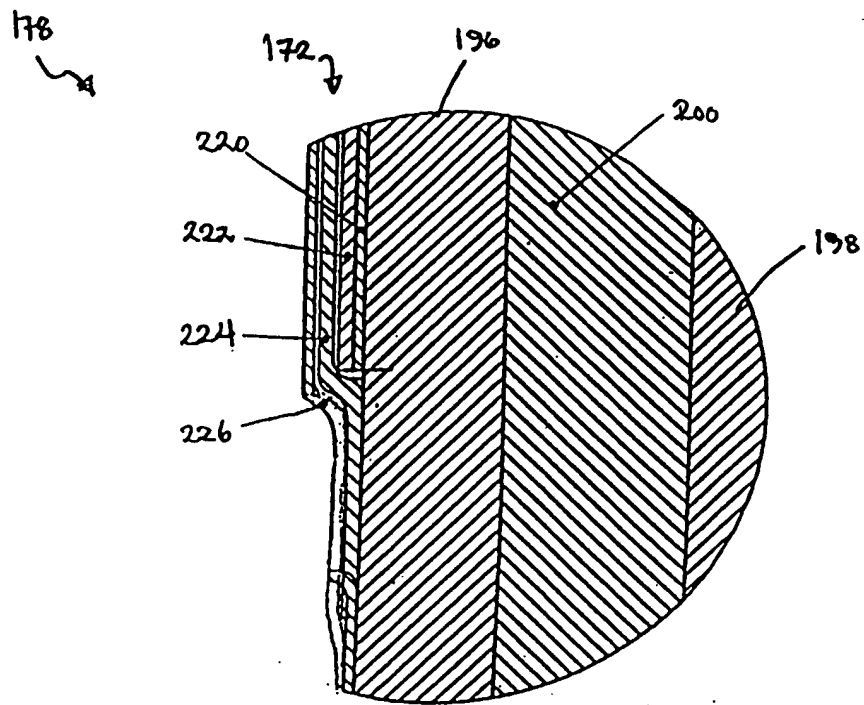


FIG. 12

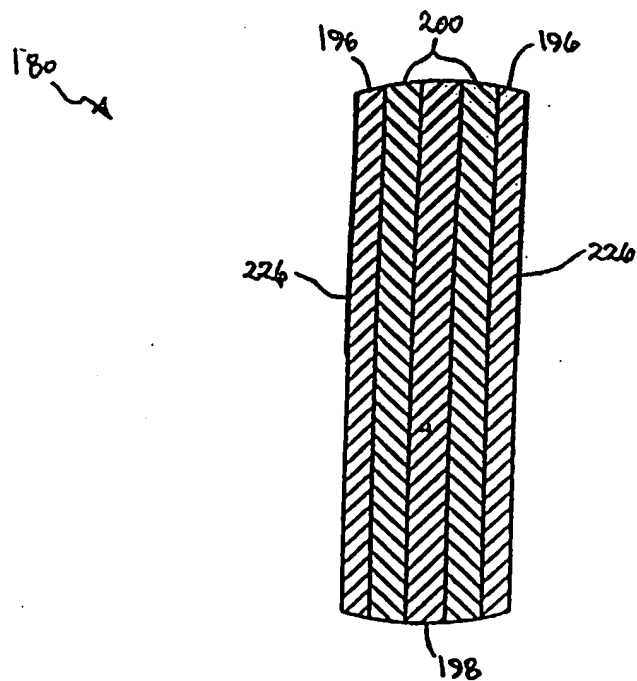


FIG. 13

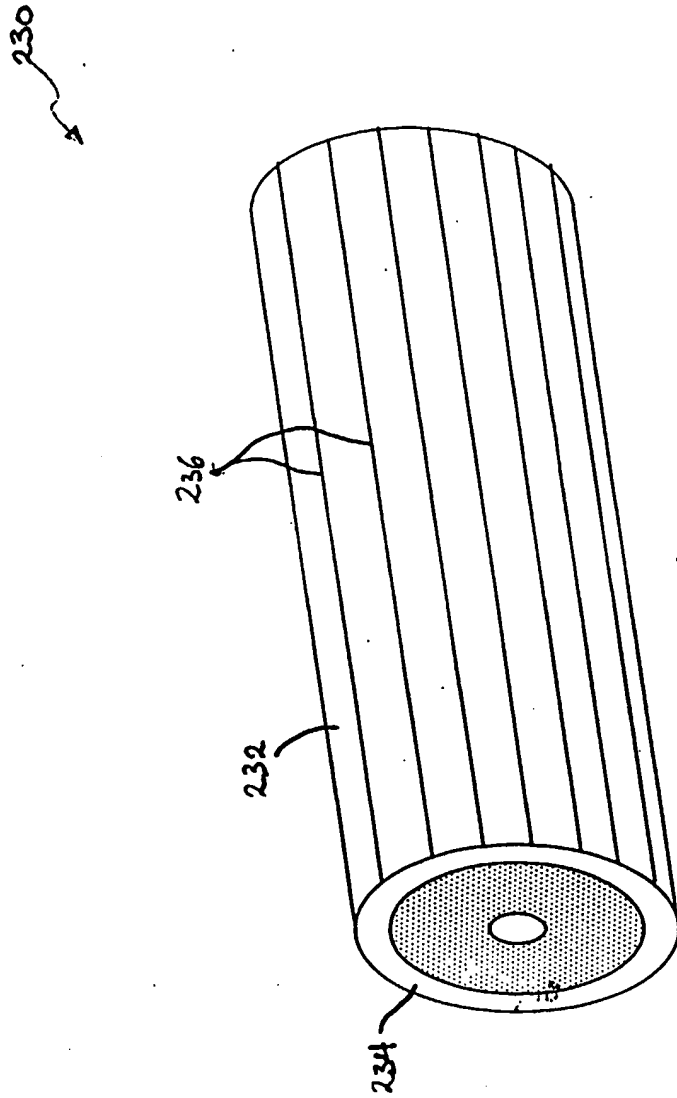


FIG. 14

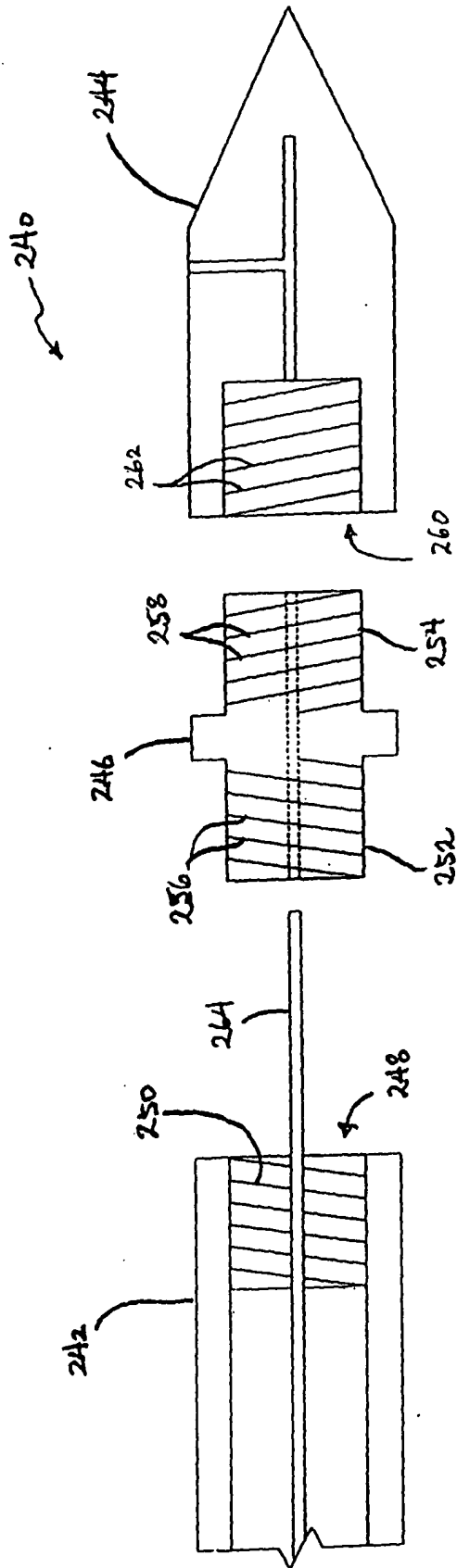


FIG. 15

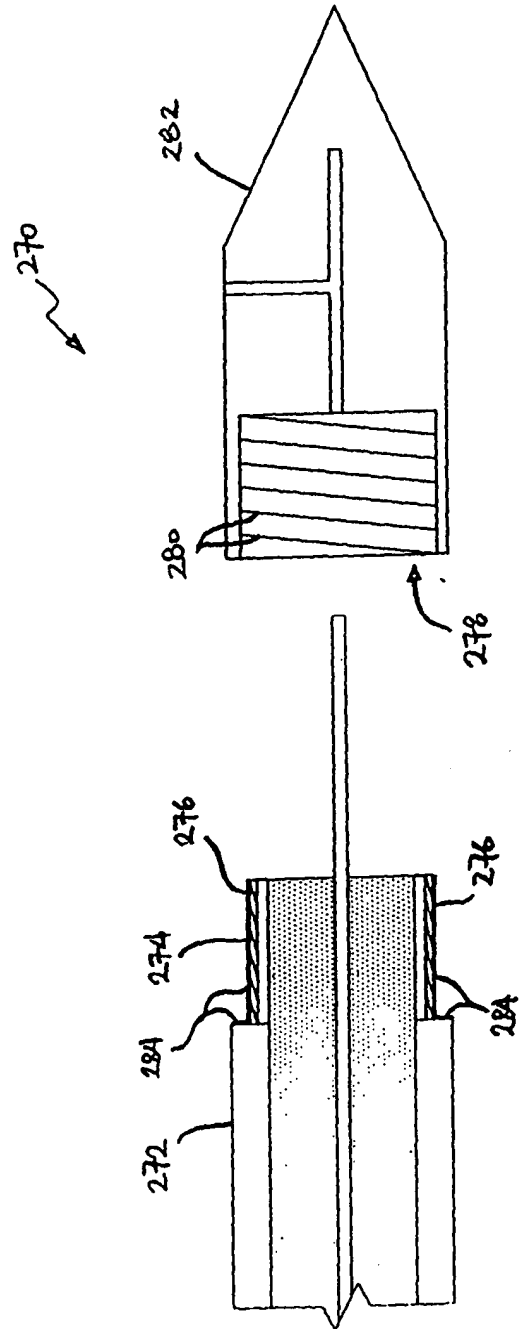


FIG. 16

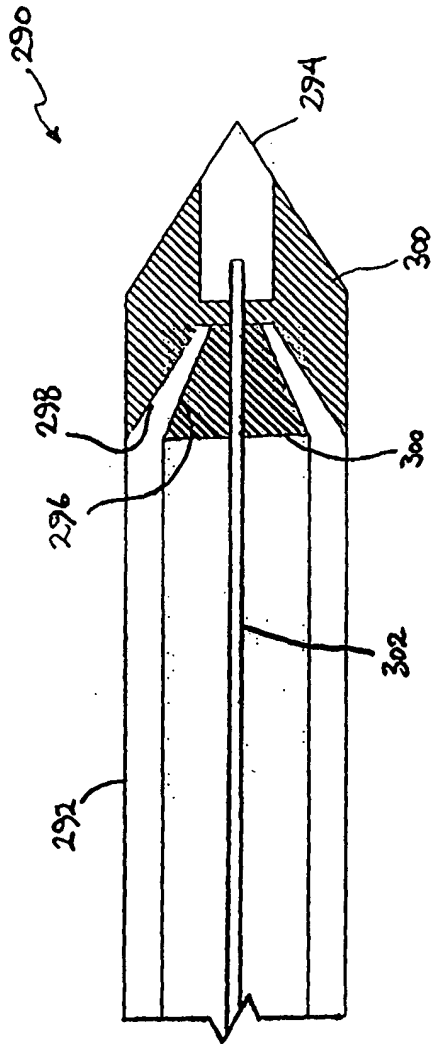


Fig. 17

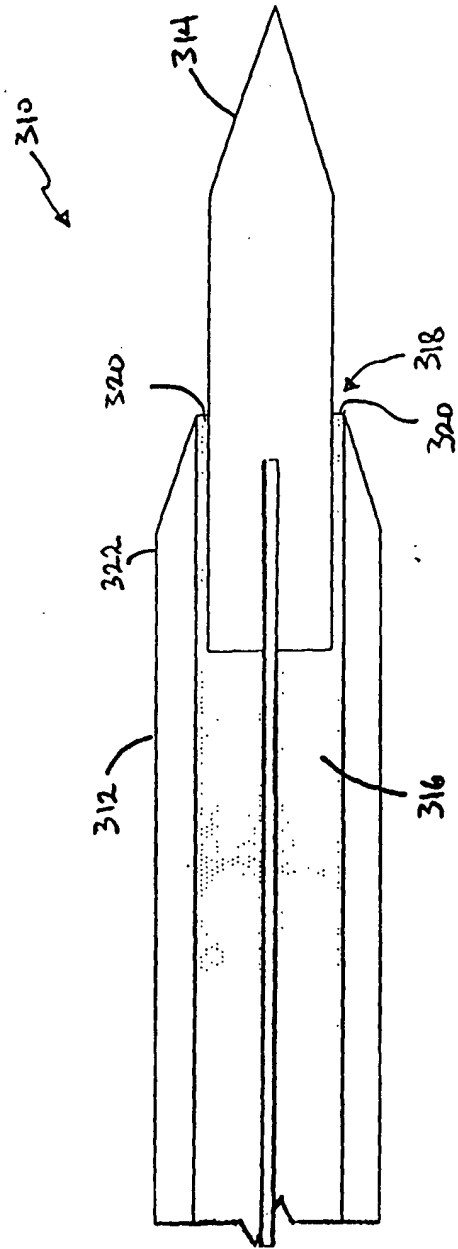


Fig. 18

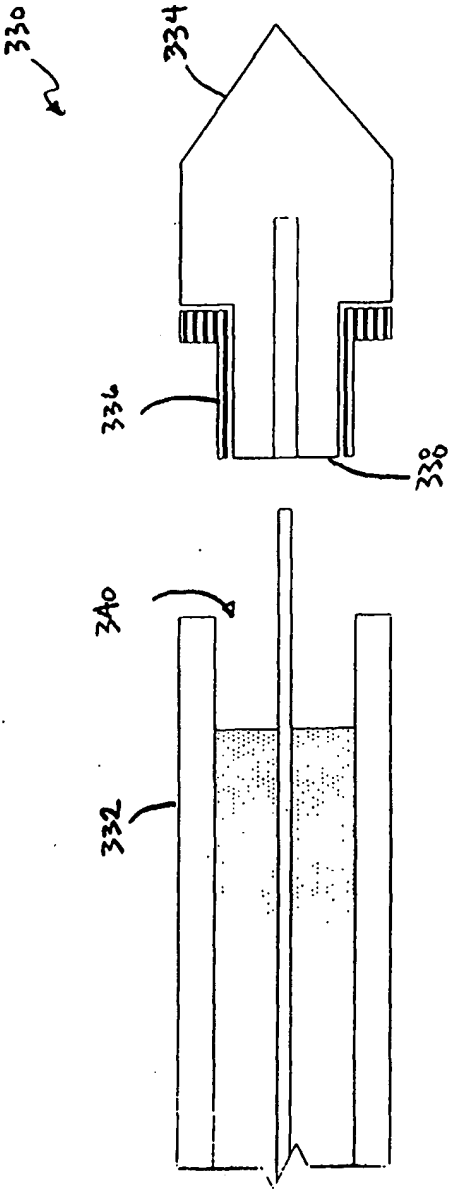


FIG. 19

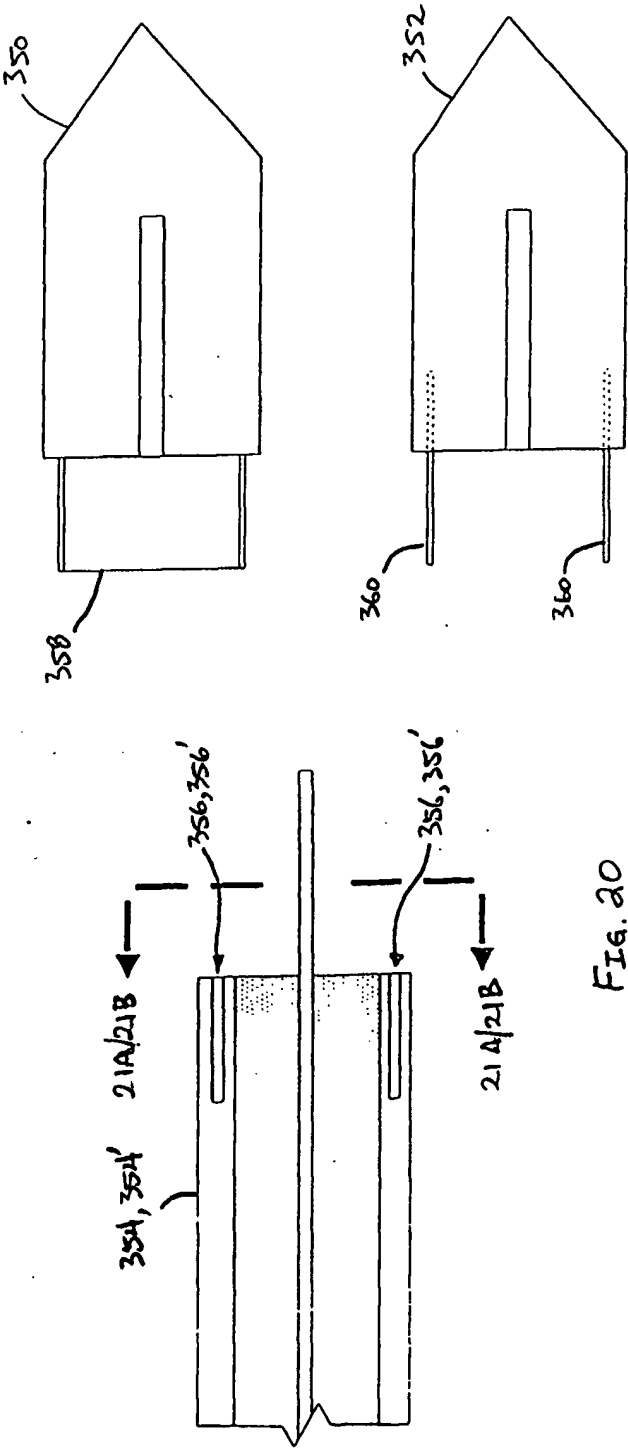


FIG. 20

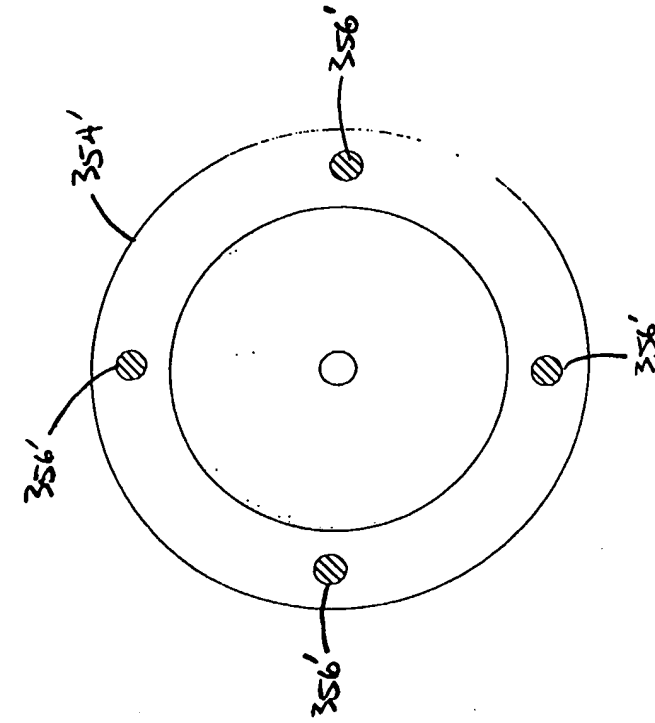


FIG. 21B

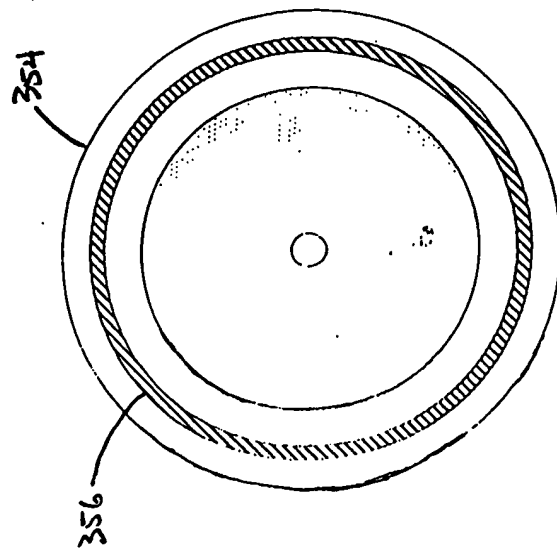


FIG. 21A

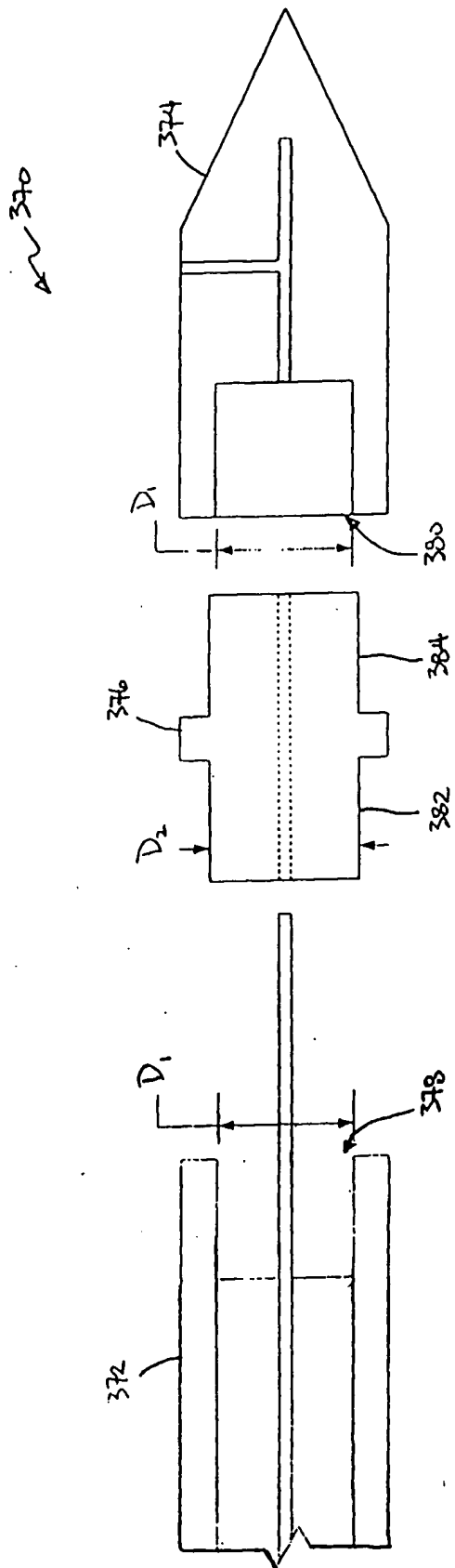


FIG. 22

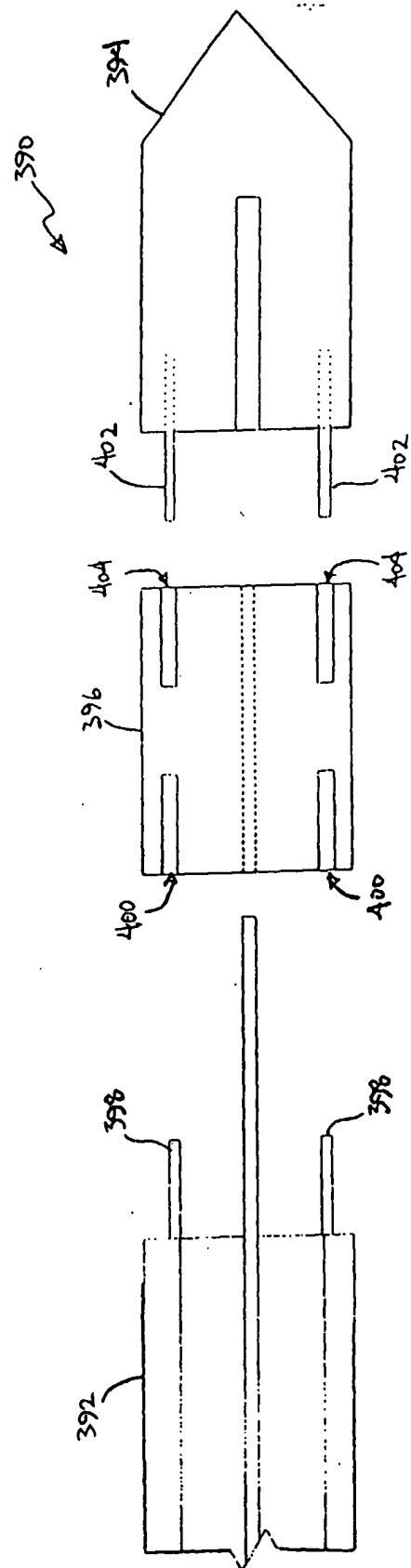


FIG. 23

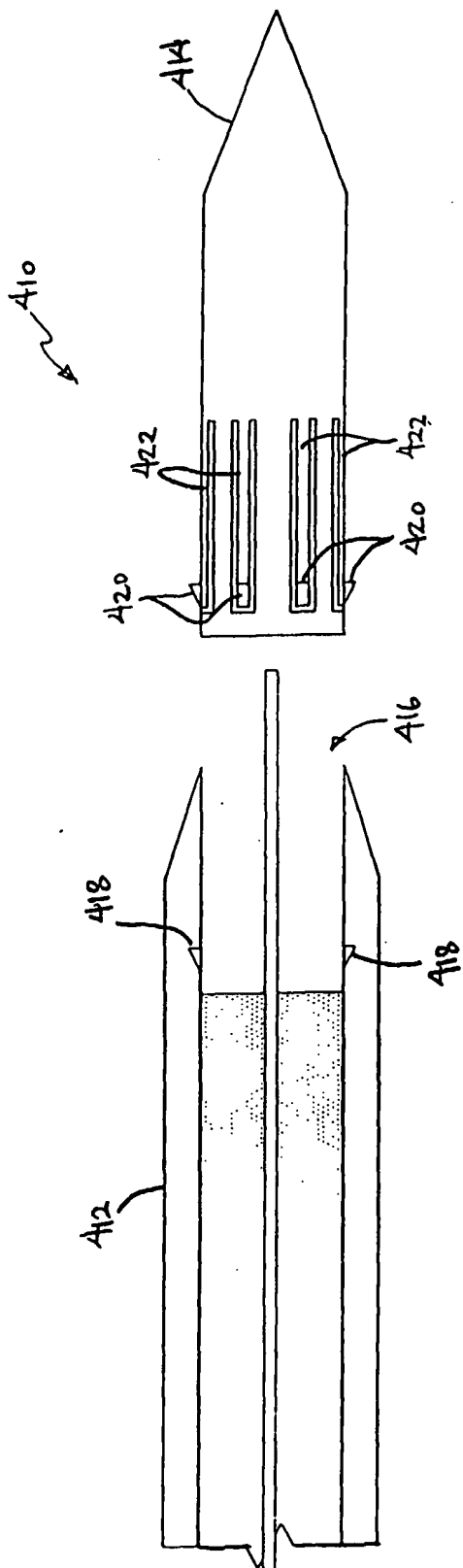


FIG. 24

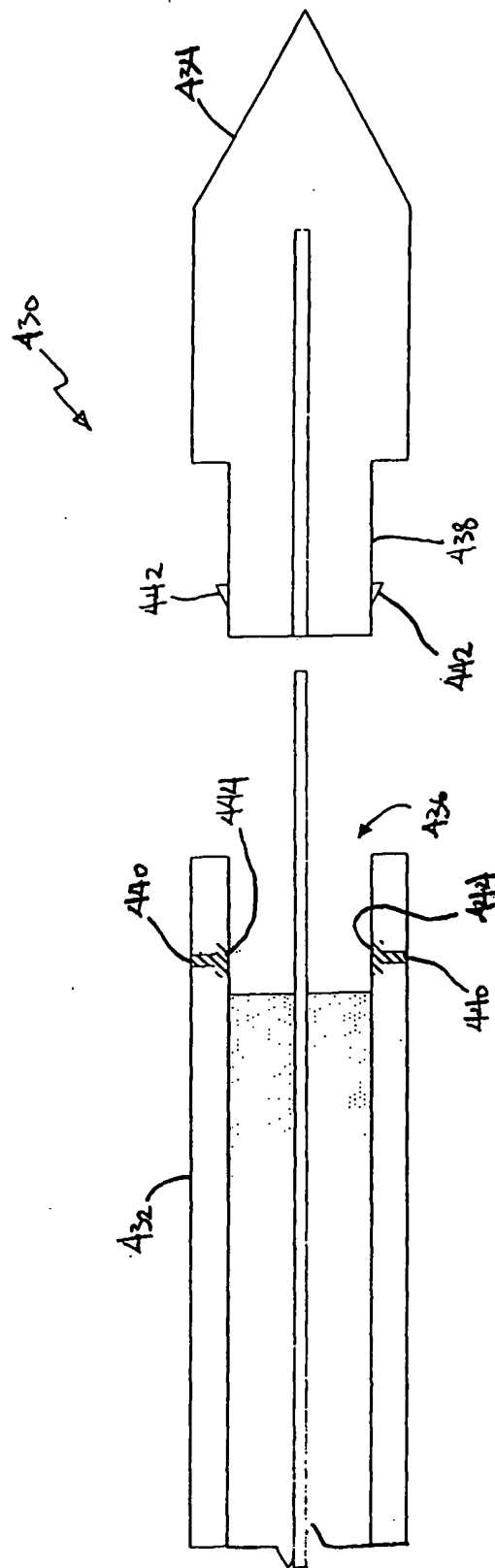


FIG. 25

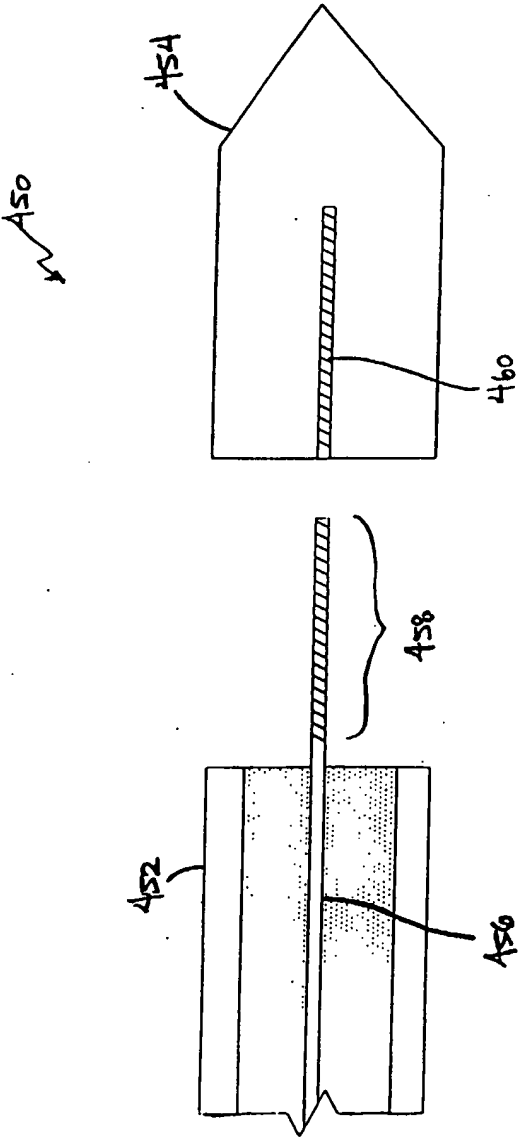


FIG. 26

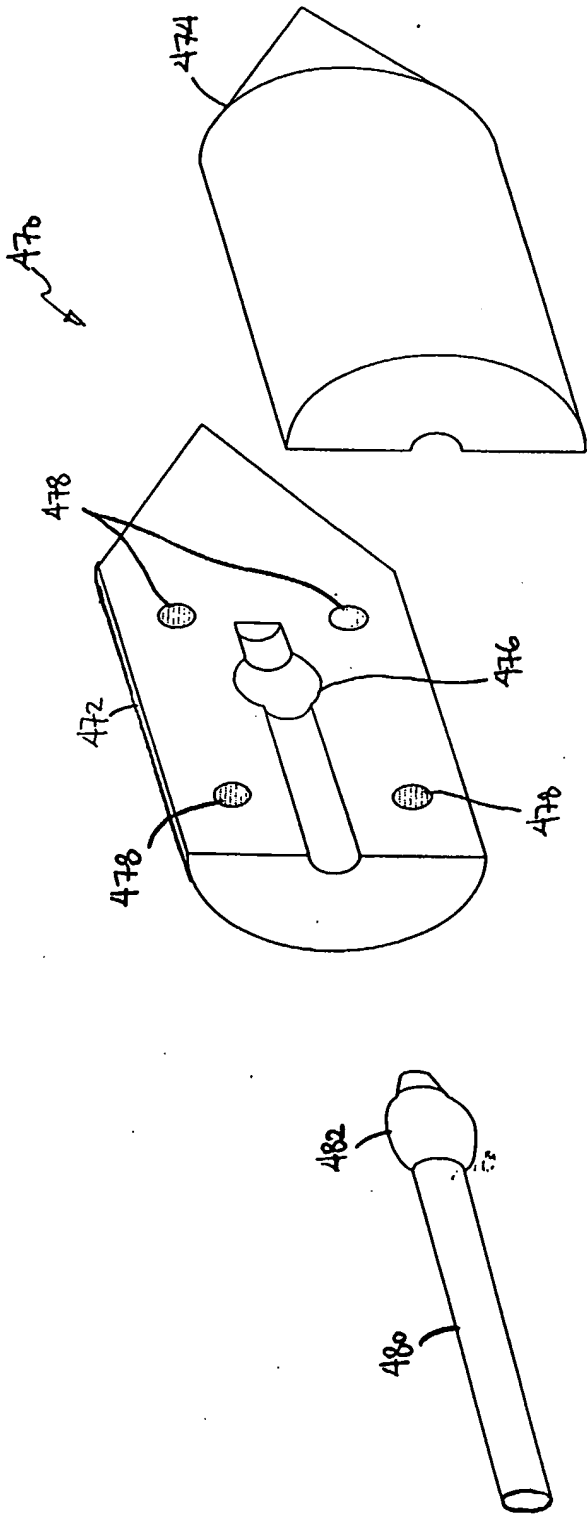


Fig. 27

490

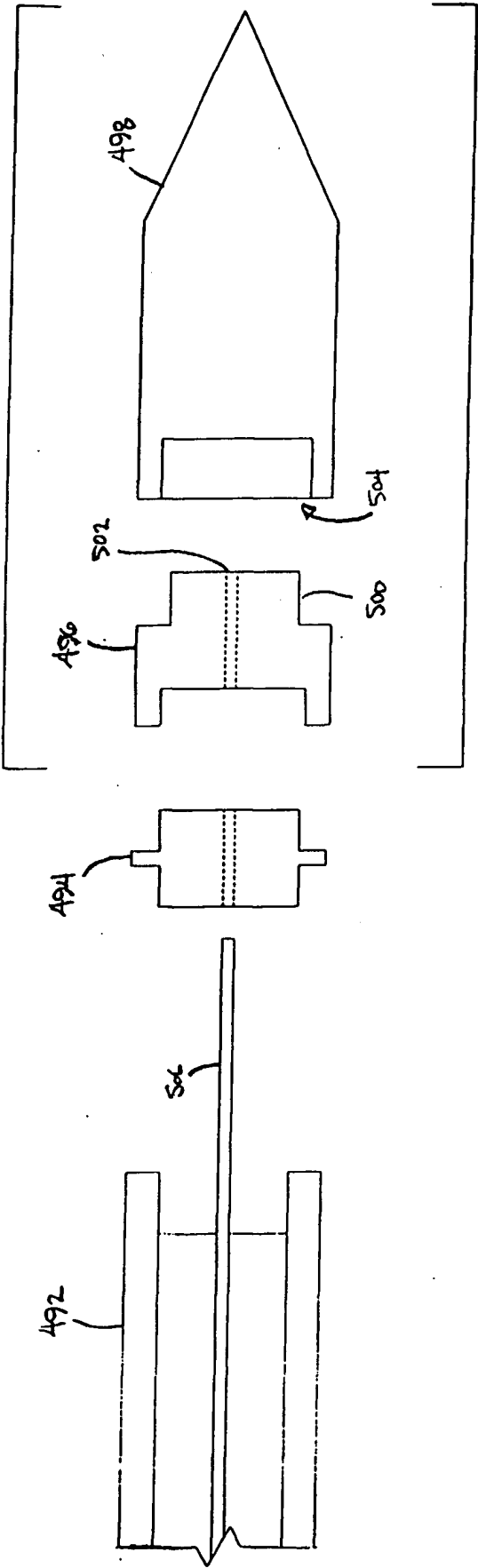


Fig. 28

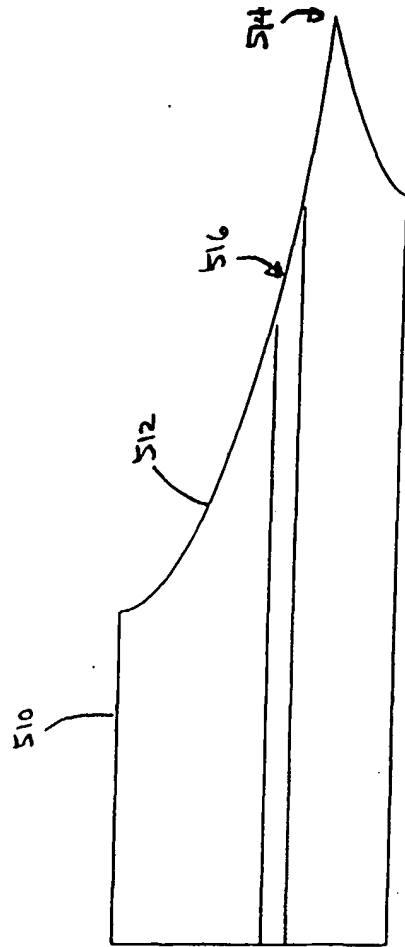


Fig. 29

Fig. 30

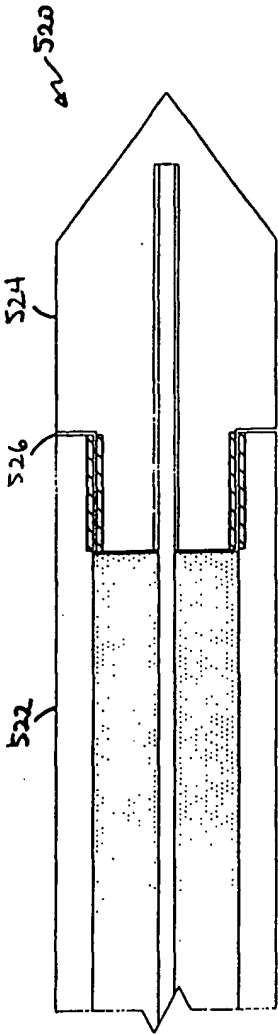


Fig. 31

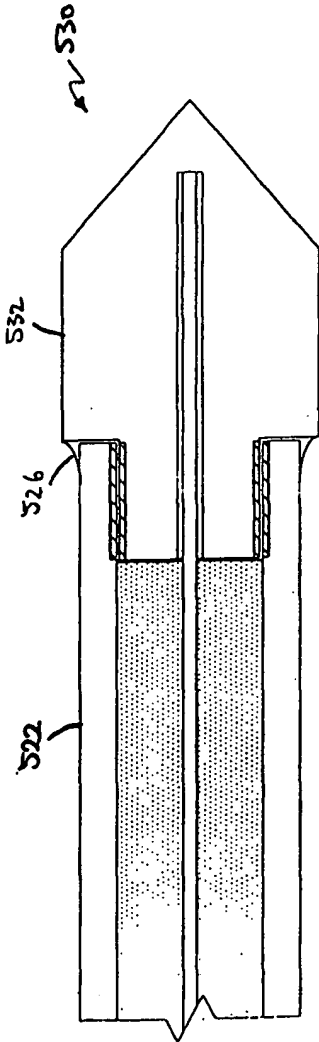
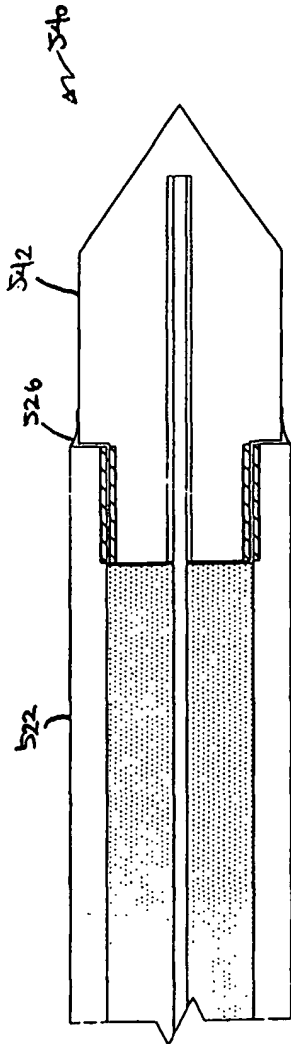


Fig. 32



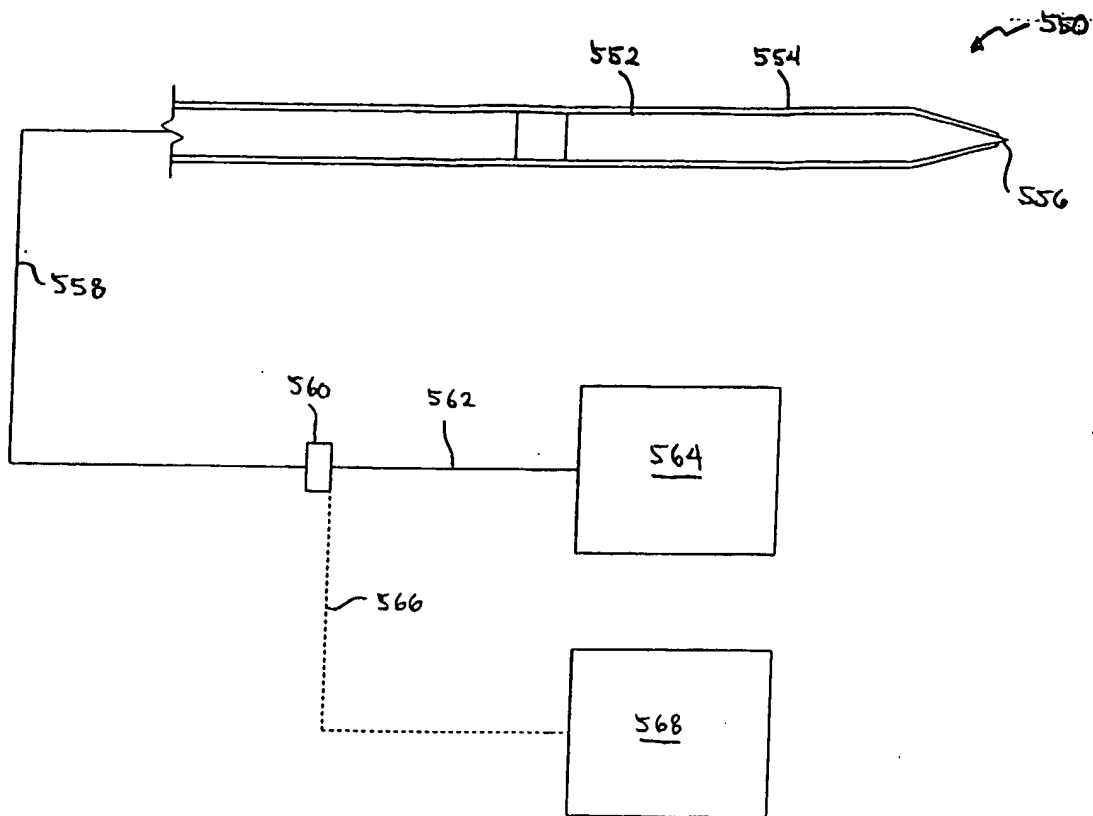


FIG. 33

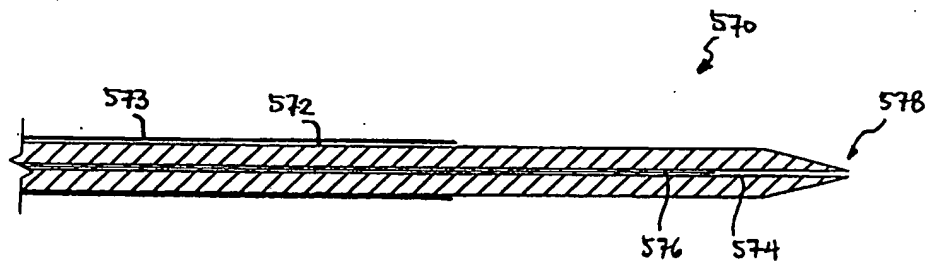


FIG. 34A

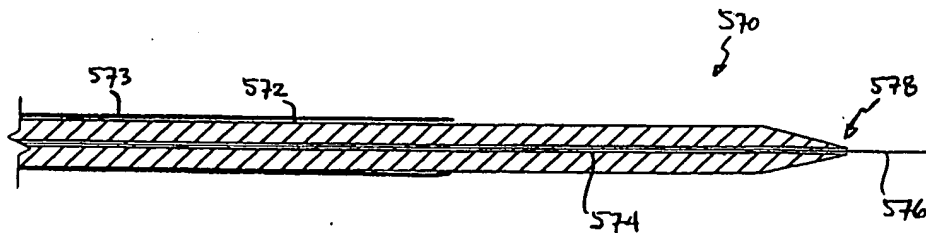


FIG. 34B

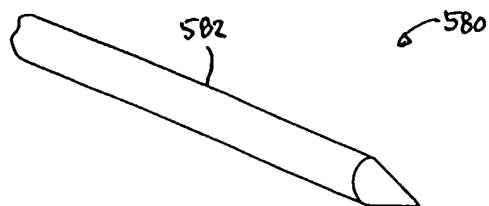


FIG. 35A

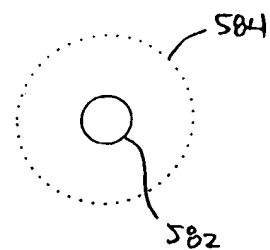


FIG. 35B

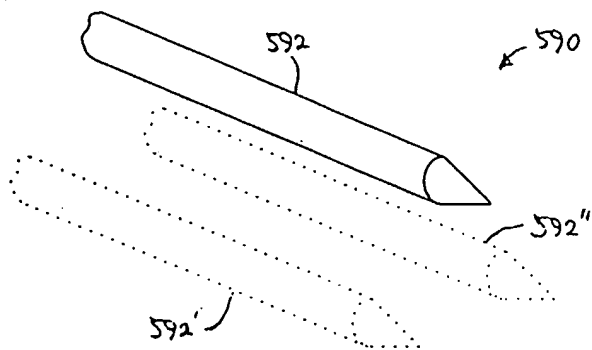


FIG. 36A

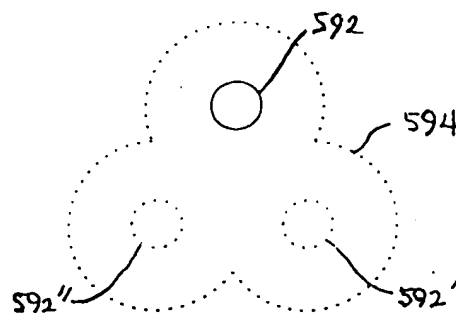


FIG. 36B

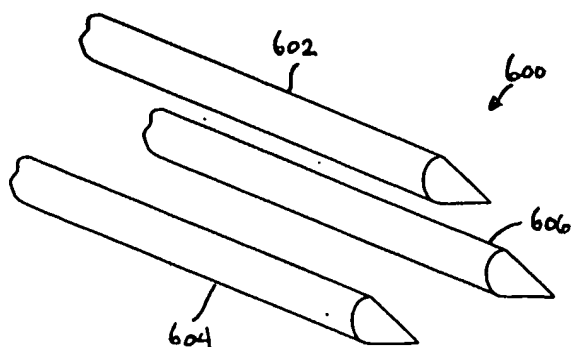


FIG. 37A

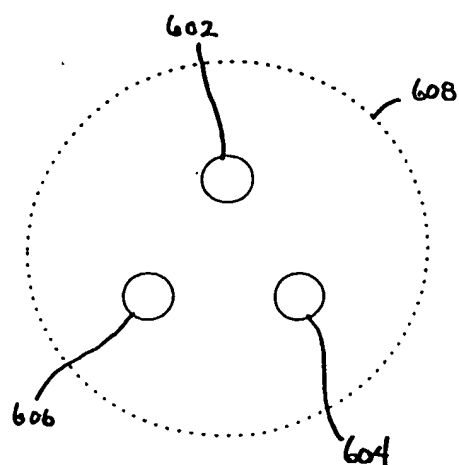


FIG. 37B

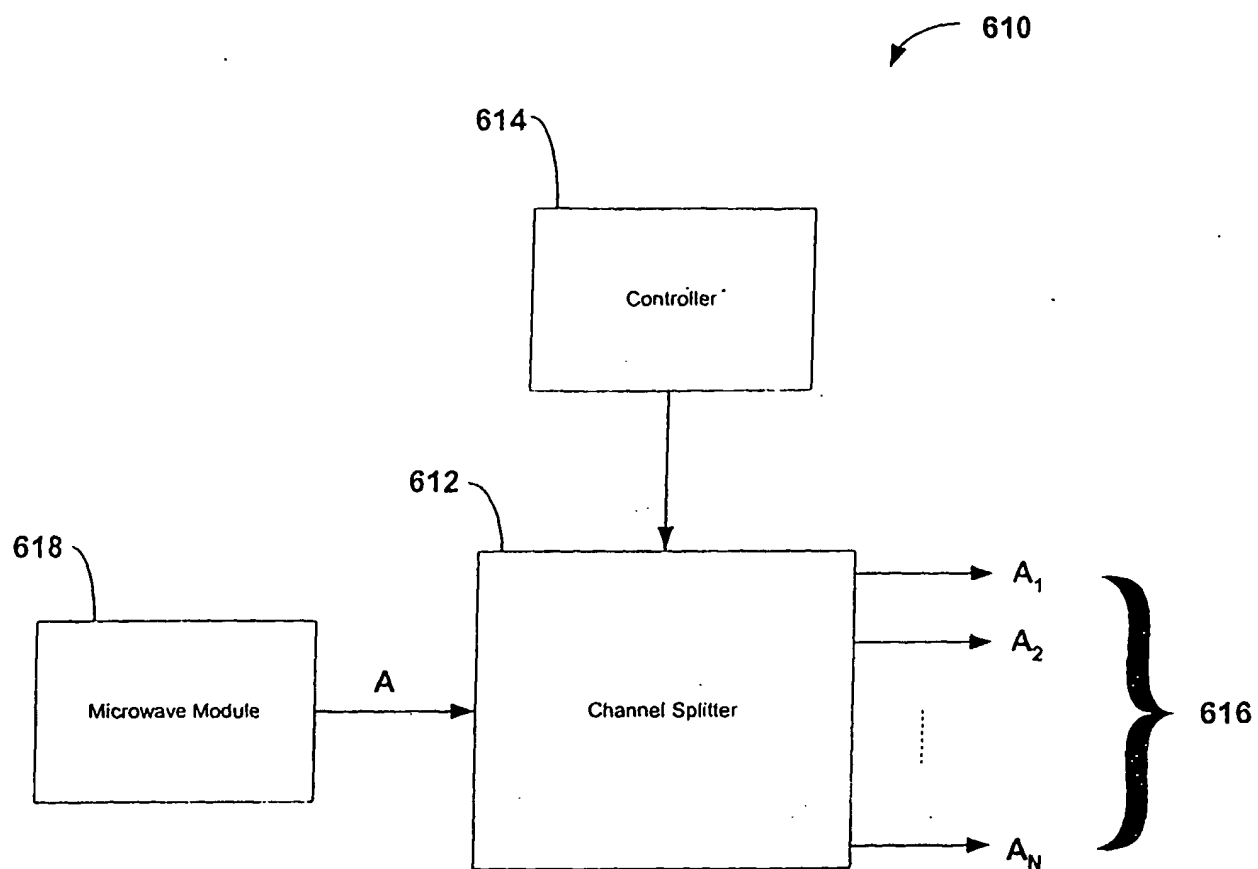


Fig. 38

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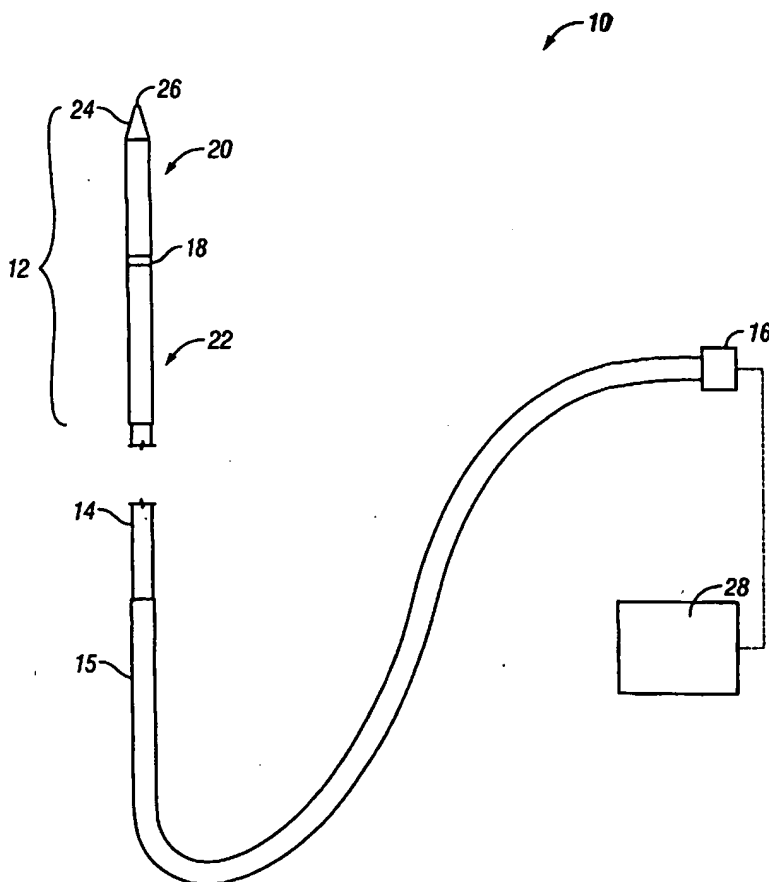
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[Continued on next page]

(54) Title: HIGH-STRENGTH MICROWAVE ANTENNA ASSEMBLIES AND METHODS OF USE



(57) Abstract: High-strength microwave antenna assemblies (10) and methods of use are described herein. The microwave antenna has a radiating portion (12) connected by a feedline (14) to a power generating source (28), e.g., a generator. The antenna is a dipole antenna with the distal end of the radiating portion being tapered and terminating at a tip to allow for direct insertion into tissue. The antenna can be used individually or in combination with multiple antennas to create a combined ablation field. When multiple antennas are used, microwave energy can be applied simultaneously to all the antennas or sequentially between the antennas. Furthermore, to facilitate positioning the antennas in or near the tissue to be treated, RF energy may be applied at the tip of the antenna to assist in cutting through the tissue.

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HIGH-STRENGTH MICROWAVE ANTENNA ASSEMBLIES AND METHODS OF USE

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application claims the benefit of priority to U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 10/272,058, entitled "High-Strength Microwave Antenna Assemblies And Methods Of Use" filed October 15, 2002, which is a continuation-in-part of U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 10/052,848 filed November 2, 2001, each of which is incorporated herein by reference in its entirety.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0002] The invention relates generally to microwave antenna probes and methods of their use which may be used in tissue ablation applications. More particularly, the invention relates to microwave antennas which may be inserted directly into tissue for diagnosis and treatment of diseases.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0003] In the treatment of diseases such as cancer, certain types of cancer cells have been found to denature at elevated temperatures which are slightly lower than temperatures normally injurious to healthy cells. These types of treatments, known generally as hyperthermia therapy, typically utilize electromagnetic radiation to heat diseased cells to temperatures above 41° C while maintaining adjacent healthy cells at lower temperatures where irreversible cell destruction will not occur. Other procedures utilizing electromagnetic radiation to heat tissue also include ablation and coagulation of the tissue. Such microwave ablation procedures, e.g., such as those performed for menorrhagia, are typically done to ablate and coagulate the targeted tissue to denature or kill it. Many procedures and types of devices utilizing electromagnetic radiation therapy are known in the art. Such microwave therapy is typically used in the treatment of tissue and organs such as the prostate, heart, and liver.

[0004] One non-invasive procedure generally involves the treatment of tissue (e.g., a tumor) underlying the skin via the use of microwave energy. The

microwave energy is able to non-invasively penetrate the skin to reach the underlying tissue. However, this non-invasive procedure may result in the unwanted heating of healthy tissue. Thus, the non-invasive use of microwave energy requires a great deal of control. This is partly why a more direct and precise method of applying microwave radiation has been sought.

[0005] Presently, there are several types of microwave probes in use, e.g., monopole, dipole, and helical. One type is a monopole antenna probe, which consists of a single, elongated microwave conductor exposed at the end of the probe. The probe is sometimes surrounded by a dielectric sleeve. The second type of microwave probe commonly used is a dipole antenna, which consists of a coaxial construction having an inner conductor and an outer conductor with a dielectric separating a portion of the inner conductor and a portion of the outer conductor. In the monopole and dipole antenna probe, microwave energy generally radiates perpendicularly from the axis of the conductor.

[0006] The typical microwave antenna has a long, thin inner conductor which extends along the axis of the probe and is surrounded by a dielectric material and is further surrounded by an outer conductor around the dielectric material such that the outer conductor also extends along the axis of the probe. In another variation of the probe which provides for effective outward radiation of energy or heating, a portion or portions of the outer conductor can be selectively removed. This type of construction is typically referred to as a "leaky waveguide" or "leaky coaxial" antenna. Another variation on the microwave probe involves having the tip formed in a uniform spiral pattern, such as a helix, to provide the necessary configuration for effective radiation. This variation can be used to direct energy in a particular direction, e.g., perpendicular to the axis, in a forward direction (i.e., towards the distal end of the antenna), or a combination thereof.

[0007] Invasive procedures and devices have been developed in which a microwave antenna probe may be either inserted directly into a point of treatment via a normal body orifice or percutaneously inserted. Such invasive procedures and devices potentially provide better temperature control of the tissue being treated. Because of the small difference between the temperature required for denaturing malignant cells and the temperature injurious to healthy cells, a known heating pattern and predictable temperature control is important so that heating is

confined to the tissue to be treated. For instance, hyperthermia treatment at the threshold temperature of about 41.5° C generally has little effect on most malignant growths of cells. However, at slightly elevated temperatures above the approximate range of 43° C to 45° C, thermal damage to most types of normal cells is routinely observed; accordingly, great care must be taken not to exceed these temperatures in healthy tissue.

[0008] However, many types of malignancies are difficult to reach and treat using non-invasive techniques or by using invasive antenna probes designed to be inserted into a normal body orifice, i.e., a body opening which is easily accessible. These types of conventional probes may be more flexible and may also avoid the need to separately sterilize the probe; however, they are structurally weak and typically require the use of an introducer or catheter to gain access to within the body. Moreover, the addition of introducers and catheters necessarily increase the diameter of the incision or access opening into the body thereby making the use of such probes more invasive and further increasing the probability of any complications that may arise.

[0009] Structurally stronger invasive probes exist and are typically long, narrow, needle-like antenna probes which may be inserted directly into the body tissue to directly access a site of a tumor or other malignancy. Such rigid probes generally have small diameters which aid not only in ease of use but also reduce the resulting trauma to the patient. A convenience of rigid antenna probes capable of direct insertion into tissue is that the probes may also allow for alternate additional uses given different situations. However, such rigid, needle-like probes commonly experience difficulties in failing to provide uniform patterns of radiated energy; they fail to provide uniform heating axially along and radially around an effective length of the probe; and it is difficult to otherwise control and direct the heating pattern when using such probes.

[0010] Accordingly, there remains a need for a microwave antenna probe which overcomes the problems discussed above. There also exists a need for a microwave antenna probe which is structurally robust enough for direct insertion into tissue without the need for additional introducers or catheters and which produces a controllable and predictable heating pattern.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0011] A microwave antenna assembly which is structurally robust enough for unaided direct insertion into tissue is described herein. The microwave antenna assembly is generally comprised of a radiating portion which may be connected to a feedline (or shaft) which in turn may be connected by a cable to a power generating source such as a generator. The microwave assembly may be a monopole microwave antenna assembly but is preferably a dipole assembly. The distal portion of the radiating portion preferably has a tapered end which terminates at a tip to allow for the direct insertion into tissue with minimal resistance. The proximal portion is located proximally of the distal portion, and a junction member is preferably located between both portions.

[0012] The adequate rigidity necessary for unaided direct insertion of the antenna assembly into tissue, e.g., percutaneously, preferably comes in part by a variety of different methods. Some of the methods include assembling the antenna under a pre-stressed condition prior to insertion into tissue. This may be accomplished in part by forcing an inner conductor, which runs longitudinally through the assembly, into a tensile condition by preferably affixing the inner conductor distal end to the distal radiating portion of the antenna assembly.

Another method includes configuring the proximal and distal radiating portions of the antenna to mechanically fasten to each other. That is, the proximal and distal radiating portions may be configured to "screw" into one another directly or to a junction member located between the two portions and which is threaded such that the portions each screw onto the junction member separately.

[0013] Another method includes attaching the proximal and distal radiating portions together by creating overlapping or interfitting joints. In this variation, either the proximal or the distal radiating portion may be configured to create an overlapping joint by interfitting with each other through a variety of joints. For instance, the distal portion may be configured to intimately fit within a receiving cavity or channel at the distal end of the proximal portion. The two portions may also be configured to have a number of pins or conical members extending to join the two. Alternatively, the two portions may be frictionally interfitted by an interference fitted joint; or depressible/retractable projections

may be disposed on either portion to interfit with corresponding depressions in the opposite portion.

[0014] To further aid in strengthening the antenna assemblies, a variety of methods may also be used for attaching the tip or distal portion. For instance, a variation may have a distal portion which may screw onto a threaded inner conductor or another variation may have an inner conductor having an anchoring element capable of holding the inner conductor within a splittable distal portion. Furthermore, a multi-sectioned distal portion may also be utilized for first attaching an inner conductor to the distal portion and then assembling the distal portion with additional variable sections. In many of the variations described herein, it may be preferable to have a dielectric material applied as a layer or coating between the two radiating portions.

[0015] Affixing the inner conductor within the distal radiating portion may be accomplished in a variety of ways, for instance, welding, brazing, soldering, or through the use of adhesives. Forcing the inner conductor into a tensile condition helps to force the outer diameter of the antenna into a compressive state. This bi-directional stress state in turn aids in rigidizing the antenna assembly.

[0016] To enable a compressive state to exist near the outer diameter, the junction member between the distal and the proximal radiating portions in some of the variations is preferably made from a sufficiently hard dielectric material, e.g., ceramic materials. The hardness of the junction member aids in transferring the compressive forces through the antenna assembly without buckling or kinking during antenna insertion into tissue. Furthermore, materials such as ceramic generally have mechanical properties where fracturing or cracking in the material is more likely to occur under tensile loading conditions. Accordingly, placing a junction under pre-stressed conditions, particularly a junction made of ceramic, may aid in preventing mechanical failure of the junction if the antenna were to incur bending moments during insertion into tissue which could subject portions of the junction under tensile loads. The junction member may also be made into uniform or non-uniform, e.g., stepped, shapes to accommodate varying antenna assembly designs.

[0017] Moreover, to improve the energy focus of an antenna assembly, an electrical choke may also be used in any of the variations described herein to contain returning currents to the distal end of the antenna assembly. Generally, the choke may be disposed on top of a dielectric material on the antenna proximally of the radiating section. The choke is preferably comprised of a conductive layer and may be further covered by a tubing or coating to force the conductive layer to conform to the underlying antenna.

[0018] Additionally, variations on the choke, the tubing or coating, any sealant layers, as well as other layers which may be disposed over the antenna assembly may be used. Certain layers, e.g., a heatshrink layer disposed over the antenna assembly, may have wires or strands integrated within the layer to further strengthen the antenna assembly. Kevlar wires, for instances, may be integrally formed into the layer and oriented longitudinally with the antenna axis to provide additional strength.

[0019] In use, to facilitate insertion of a microwave antenna into tissue, various ablative tips may be utilized. For example, one variation may utilize an antenna which is insulated along its length except at the distal tip. The distal tip may be energized by RF energy delivered through, e.g., the inner conductor. During antenna deployment, RF energy may be applied continuously or selectively to the exposed distal tip to facilitate antenna insertion by using the RF energized tip to cut through the tissue as the antenna is advanced. Another variation may utilize an inner conductor which may be slidably disposed within a lumen through the antenna. As the antenna is advanced through the tissue, when resistance is encountered the inner conductor, which may be attached to an RF generator, may be advanced distally within the lumen to extend at least partially out of the distal tip of the antenna. RF energy may then be applied such that the energized inner conductor facilitates antenna advancement by cutting the tissue.

[0020] Any of the antenna variations described herein may be utilized in a variety of methods to effect tissue treatment. For instance, in one variation, a single antenna may be used to treat the tissue in a single location. In another variation, a single antenna may be positioned within a first region of tissue for treatment, then the antenna may be removed and repositioned in another region of tissue, and so on for any number of times and positions, until satisfactory

treatment is effected. In yet another variation, multiple antennas may be used simultaneously to effect treatment to a region of tissue. In this variation, the simultaneous use of multiple antennas may effectively create a combined treatment or ablation field which is larger than an ablation field that a single antenna used alone or sequentially may create. In yet another variation, multiple antennas may be used together but the power provided to each may be cycled between the antennas in an unlimited number of combinations through the use of multiplexing methods. Such a use may reduce the overall power of the system for treatment while effectively treating the tissue region of interest.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0021] Fig. 1 shows a representative diagram of a variation of a microwave antenna assembly.

[0022] Figs. 2A and 2B show an end view and a cross-sectional view, respectively, of a conventional dipole microwave antenna assembly.

[0023] Fig. 3 shows an exploded cross-sectional view of a variation on a pre-stressed antenna assembly.

[0024] Fig. 4 shows the assembled pre-stressed antenna assembly of Fig. 3 and the directions of stress loads created within the assembly.

[0025] Fig. 5 shows another variation of pre-stressed antenna assembly having a sharpened distal tip.

[0026] Fig. 6 shows an exploded cross-sectional view of another variation on pre-stressed antenna assembly having a non-uniform junction member.

[0027] Fig. 7 shows an exploded cross-sectional view of yet another variation on pre-stressed antenna assembly having an access channel defined along the side of the antenna.

[0028] Fig. 8 shows a pre-stressed monopole variation of a microwave antenna assembly.

[0029] Fig. 9A shows a side view of another variation on a pre-stressed antenna assembly having an electrical choke.

[0030] Fig. 9B shows a cross-sectional view of the assembly of Fig. 9A.

[0031] Fig. 10 shows a detailed view of a variation on the radiating portion of Fig. 9B.

[0032] Fig. 11 shows a detailed view of a variation on the transition from the radiating portion to the electrical choke of Fig. 9B.

[0033] Fig. 12 shows a detailed view of a variation on the different layers within the electrical choke of Fig. 9B.

[0034] Fig. 13 shows a detailed view of a variation on the feedline of Fig. 9B.

[0035] Fig. 14 shows an isometric view of a sectioned antenna assembly having a layer, such as a heatshrink layer, formed with wires or strands longitudinally orientated within the layer.

[0036] Fig. 15 shows an exploded cross-sectional side view of a variation of the microwave antenna assembly having a mechanically threaded interface.

[0037] Fig. 16 shows an exploded cross-sectional side view of another variation of the antenna assembly also having a mechanically threaded interface.

[0038] Fig. 17 shows a cross-sectional side view of a crimped or overlapping variation of the antenna assembly.

[0039] Fig. 18 shows a cross-sectional side view of an antenna assembly where the proximal portion may be configured to receive and hold the distal portion in an overlapping joint.

[0040] Fig. 19 shows an exploded cross-sectional side view of a variation of the antenna assembly having an interfitting joint with an overlapping junction member.

[0041] Fig. 20 shows a cross-sectional side view of an antenna assembly with two variations on the distal portion joint for interfitting with the proximal portion.

[0042] Figs. 21A and 21B show the corresponding end views of the proximal portion from Fig. 20 with two variations for interfitting with the distal portions.

[0043] Fig. 22 shows an exploded cross-sectional side view of another variation where the antenna may be assembled using overlapping interference-fitted joints.

[0044] Fig. 23 shows another variation in an exploded cross-sectional side view of an antenna assembled via a junction member and multiple pins.

[0045] Fig. 24 shows an exploded cross-sectional side view of another variation in which the distal portion may have a plurality of projections which interfit with corresponding depressions within the proximal portion.

[0046] Fig. 25 shows another variation in which the projections and their corresponding interfitting depressions may have corresponding access channels defined in the proximal portion through which the distal portion may be welded, soldered, brazed, or adhesively affixed to the proximal portion.

[0047] Fig. 26 shows a side view of a variation on attaching the distal portion to the inner conductor by a screw-on method.

[0048] Fig. 27 shows an isometric exploded view of another variation on attaching the distal portion by anchoring the inner conductor within a splittable distal portion.

[0049] Fig. 28 shows an exploded side view of a multi-sectioned distal portion variation.

[0050] Fig. 29 shows a cross-sectioned side view of an alternative distal portion having an arcuate or curved sloping face to facilitate antenna assembly as well as entry into tissue.

[0051] Fig. 30 shows an assembled cross-sectional side view of a representative antenna assembly having a constant diameter over the proximal and distal portions.

[0052] Fig. 31 shows the antenna of Fig. 30 but with the distal portion having a diameter larger than the diameter of the proximal portion.

[0053] Fig. 32 shows the antenna of Fig. 30 but with the distal portion having a diameter smaller than the diameter of the proximal portion.

[0054] Fig. 33 shows an antenna variation which may be used with RF energy to facilitate insertion into tissue or to cut through obstructive tissue.

[0055] Figs. 34A and 34B show another variation which may also be used to deliver RF energy.

[0056] Figs. 35A and 35B show an isometric and end view, respectively, of one variation in using a single antenna.

[0057] Figs. 36A and 36B show an isometric and end view, respectively, of another variation in using a single antenna in multiple positions.

[0058] Figs. 37A and 37B show an isometric and end view, respectively, of yet another variation in using multiple antennas in multiple positions.

[0059] Fig. 38 shows a schematic illustration of a variation for a channel splitter assembly for creating multiple channels using a single source.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0060] In invasively treating diseased areas of tissue in a patient, trauma may be caused to the patient resulting in pain and other complications. Various microwave antenna assemblies, as described herein, are less traumatic than devices currently available and as described in further detail below, methods of manufacturing such devices are also described. Generally, an apparatus of the present invention allows for the direct insertion of a microwave antenna into tissue for the purposes of diagnosis and treatment of disease. Fig. 1 shows a representative diagram of a variation of a microwave antenna assembly 10 of the present invention. The antenna assembly 10 is generally comprised of radiating portion 12 which may be connected by feedline 14 (or shaft) via cable 15 to connector 16, which may further connect the assembly 10 to a power generating source 28, e.g., a generator. Assembly 10, as shown, is a dipole microwave antenna assembly, but other antenna assemblies, e.g., monopole or leaky wave antenna assemblies, may also utilize the principles set forth herein. Distal portion 20 of radiating portion 12 preferably has a tapered end 24 which terminates at a tip 26 to allow for insertion into tissue with minimal resistance. In those cases where the radiating portion 12 is inserted into a pre-existing opening, tip 26 may be rounded or flat.

[0061] In some applications a microwave antenna requires adequate structural strength to prevent bending of the antenna, e.g., where the antenna is directly inserted into tissue, where the antenna undergoes bending moments after insertion, etc. Accordingly, there are various configurations to increase the antenna strength without compromising desirable radiative properties and the manufacturability of such an antenna. One configuration involves placing the antenna assembly under a compressive load to stiffen the radiating portions. Another configuration involves mechanically fastening, e.g., in a screw-like manner, the radiating portions together to provide a joint which will withstand

bending moments. A further configuration may also involve creating overlapping joints between the radiating portions of the antenna assembly to provide a high-strength antenna. Furthermore, alternate configurations of attaching a distal tip or distal radiating portion to an antenna may be utilized to further increase the antenna strength.

Antenna Assembly Via Compression

[0062] Generally, the antenna assembly 10 in Fig. 1 shows a variation where a compressive load may be used to increase antenna strength. Proximal portion 22 is located proximally of distal portion 20, and junction member 18 is preferably located between both portions such that a compressive force is applied by distal and proximal portions 20, 22 upon junction member 18. Placing distal and proximal portions 20, 22 in a pre-stressed condition prior to insertion into tissue enables assembly 10 to maintain a stiffness that is sufficient to allow for unaided insertion into the tissue while maintaining a minimal antenna diameter, as described in detail below.

[0063] Feedline 14 may electrically connect antenna assembly 10 via cable 15 to generator 28 and usually comprises a coaxial cable made of a conductive metal which may be semi-rigid or flexible. Feedline 14 may also have a variable length from a proximal end of radiating portion 12 to a distal end of cable 15 ranging between about 1 to 10 inches. Most feedlines may be constructed of copper, gold, or other conductive metals with similar conductivity values, but feedline 14 is preferably made of stainless steel. The metals may also be plated with other materials, e.g., other conductive materials, to improve their properties, e.g., to improve conductivity or decrease energy loss, etc. A feedline 14, such as one made of stainless steel, preferably has an impedance of about 50 Ω and to improve its conductivity, the stainless steel may be coated with a layer of a conductive material such as copper or gold. Although stainless steel may not offer the same conductivity as other metals, it does offer strength required to puncture tissue and/or skin.

[0064] Fig. 2A and 2B show an end view and a cross-sectional view, respectively, of a conventional dipole microwave antenna assembly 30. As seen, antenna assembly 30 has a proximal end 32 which may be connected to a feedline

14, as further discussed herein, and terminates at distal end 34. The radiating portion of antenna 30 comprises proximal radiating portion 36 and distal radiating portion 38. Proximal radiating portion 36 may typically have an outer conductor 42 and an inner conductor 44, each of which extends along a longitudinal axis. Between the outer and inner conductors 42, 44 is typically a dielectric material 46 which is also disposed longitudinally between the conductors 42, 44 to electrically separate them. A dielectric material may constitute any number of appropriate materials, including air. Distal portion 48 is also made from a conductive material, as discussed below. Proximal and distal radiating portions 36, 38 align at junction 40, which is typically made of a dielectric material, e.g., adhesives, and are also supported by inner conductor 44 which runs through junction opening 50 and at least partially through distal portion 48. However, as discussed above, the construction of conventional antenna assembly 30 is structurally weak at junction 40.

[0065] In operation, microwave energy having a wavelength, λ , is transmitted through antenna assembly 30 along both proximal and distal radiating portions 36, 38. This energy is then radiated into the surrounding medium, e.g., tissue. The length of the antenna for efficient radiation may be dependent at least on the effective wavelength, λ_{eff} , which is dependent upon the dielectric properties of the medium being radiated into. Energy from the antenna assembly 30 radiates and the surrounding medium is subsequently heated. An antenna assembly 30 through which microwave energy is transmitted at a wavelength, λ , may have differing effective wavelengths, λ_{eff} , depending upon the surrounding medium, e.g., liver tissue, as opposed to, e.g., breast tissue. Also affecting the effective wavelength, λ_{eff} , are coatings which may be disposed over antenna assembly 30, as discussed further below.

[0066] Fig. 3 shows an exploded cross-sectional view of a variation on pre-stressed antenna assembly 60 made at least in part according to the present invention. In making antenna assembly 60, junction member 62 may be placed about inner conductor 44 through junction opening 64. Distal portion 48 may be placed over inner conductor 44 and then compressed such that junction member 62 is placed under a compressive load generated between proximal radiating portion 36 and distal radiating portion 38 to create pre-stressed antenna assembly

70, as shown in Fig. 4. Antenna assembly 70 may have an overall length of about 1.42 inches and an outer diameter of about 0.091 inches. The pre-stressed loading condition on antenna assembly 70 preferably exists when assembly 70 is under a state of zero external stress, that is, when assembly 70 is not acted upon by any external forces, e.g., contact with tissue, external bending moments, etc.

[0067] The compression load is preferably first created by feeding distal portion 48 over inner conductor 44 until junction member 62 is under compression, then inner conductor 44 is preferably affixed to distal portion 48 to maintain the compression load on junction member 62. Some clearance may be necessary between junction member 62 and inner conductor 44 to avoid any interference resistance between the two. Inner conductor 44 may be affixed to distal portion 48 along interface 72 by a variety of methods, such as welding, brazing, soldering, or by use of adhesives. The compression loading occurs such that while inner conductor 44 is placed under tension along direction 76, distal portion 48 places the outer portions of junction member 62 under compression along directions 74. Inner conductor 44 may be heated prior to affixing it to distal portion 48 by any number of methods because heating inner conductor 44 may expand the conductor in a longitudinal direction (depending upon the coefficient of thermal expansion of the inner conductor 44).

[0068] For example, heating inner conductor 44 may be accomplished during the welding or soldering procedure. Upon cooling, inner conductor 44 may contract accordingly and impart a tensile force upon the conductor 44 while simultaneously pulling junction member 62 into compression. To allow the compression loading to transfer efficiently through assembly 70, junction member 62 is preferably made of a dielectric material which has a sufficiently high compressive strength and high elastic modulus, i.e., resistant to elastic or plastic deformation under a compression load. Therefore, junction member 62 is preferably made from materials such as ceramics, e.g., Al_2O_3 , Boron Nitride, stabilized Zirconia, etc. Alternatively, a junction member 62 made of a metal and sufficiently coated with a dielectric or polymer may be used, provided the dielectric coating is sufficiently thick to provide adequate insulation. To prevent energy from conducting directly into the tissue during use, a dielectric layer having a thickness between about 0.0001 to 0.003 inches, may be coated directly

over antenna assembly 70. The dielectric coating may increase the radiated energy and is preferably made from a ceramic material, such as Al_2O_3 , TiO_2 , etc., and may also be optionally further coated with a lubricious material such as Teflon, polytetrafluoroethylene (PTFE), or fluorinated ethylene propylene (FEP), etc. In addition to the dielectric coating, a sealant layer may also be coated either directly over the antenna assembly 70, or preferably over the dielectric layer to provide a lubricious surface for facilitating insertion into a patient as well as to prevent tissue from sticking to the antenna assembly 70. The sealant layer may be any variety of polymer, but is preferably a thermoplastic polymer and may have a thickness varying from a few angstroms to as thick as necessary for the application at hand. Varying these coating thicknesses over antenna assembly 70 may vary the effective wavelengths, λ_{eff} , of the radiation being transmitted by the antenna. Thus, one may vary the coating thicknesses over the assembly 70 to achieve a predetermined effective wavelength depending upon the desired results.

[0069] Fig. 5 shows another variation of pre-stressed antenna assembly 80. This variation also has proximal radiating portion 82 attached to distal radiating portion 84 with junction member 86 therebetween under a compression load, as described above. Proximal radiating portion 82 may have outer conductor 88 and inner conductor 92 extending longitudinally with dielectric material 90 disposed in-between conductors 88, 92. However, this variation shows distal end 94 having distal radiating portion 84 with tapered end 96 terminating at tip 98, which is preferably sharpened to allow for easy insertion into tissue. A preferable method of optimizing the amount of radiated energy from assembly 80 may include adjusting the length of proximal radiating portion 82 to correspond to a length of $\lambda/4$ of the radiation being transmitted through assembly 80, and likewise adjusting a cumulative (or overall) length of distal radiating portion 84 and junction 86 to also correspond to a length of $\lambda/4$. Adjusting the lengths of proximal and distal radiating portions 82, 84 to correspond to the wavelength of the transmitted microwaves may be done to optimize the amount of radiated energy and accordingly, the amount of the medium or tissue which is subsequently heated. The actual lengths of proximal and distal radiating portions 82, 84 may, of course, vary and is not constrained to meet a $\lambda/4$ length. When antenna assembly 80 is radiating energy, the ablation field is variable 3-

dimensionally and may be roughly spherical or ellipsoid and centers on junction 86 and extends to the ends of the proximal and distal radiating portions 82, 84, respectively.

[0070] The location of tip 98 may be proportional to a distance of $\lambda/4$ of the radiation being transmitted through assembly 80, but because tip 98 terminates at tapered end 96, the angled surface of taper 96 may be taken into account. Thus, the total distance along the outer surfaces of assembly 80 from B to C plus the distance from C to D may accord to the distance of $\lambda/4$. The length of proximal radiating portion 82, i.e., the distance along the outer surface of assembly 80 from A to B, may also accord to the distance of $\lambda/4$, as above. Although it is preferable to have the length of the radiating portion of the antenna accord with a distance of the wavelength, λ , it is not necessary for operation of the device, as described above. That is, an antenna assembly having a radiating portion with a length in accordance with a first wavelength may generally still be used for transmitting radiation having a second wavelength, or third wavelength, or so on, although with a possible reduction in efficiency.

[0071] Fig. 6 shows an exploded cross-sectional view of another variation on pre-stressed antenna assembly 100. Assembly 100 shows a variation of junction member 102 which has a radial thickness which is non-uniform about a longitudinal axis as defined by junction member 102. The proximal portion is comprised of outer conductor 110, inner conductor 112, dielectric material 114, as above. However, junction 102 is shown in this variation as a stepped member having at least two different radiuses. In other variations, the junction may be curved or have multiple steps. Central radius 104 of junction member 102 is shown as having a diameter similar to that of outer conductor 110 and distal portion 120. Stepped radius 106, which is preferably smaller than central radius 104, may be symmetrically disposed both proximally and distally of central radius 104. To accommodate stepped junction member 102 during the assembly of antenna 100, receiving cavity 116 may be made in dielectric material 114 and receiving cavity 118 may be made in distal portion 120 to allow for the interfitting of the respective parts. Such a stepped design may allow for the compression load to be concentrated longitudinally upon the central radius 104 of junction member 102 to allow for the efficient transfer of the load along the proximal portion.

[0072] In addition to stepped junction member 102, Fig. 6 also shows channel 122 extending longitudinally from distal tip 124 to receiving cavity 118. Once inner conductor 112 may be placed through junction opening 108 and into distal portion 120, either partially or entirely therethrough, channel 122 may allow for access to inner conductor 112 for the purpose of affixing it to distal portion 120. Affixing inner conductor 112 may be done to place it under tension by any of the methods as described above, such as welding or soldering.

[0073] However, having channel 122 extend from the distal tip 124 to inner conductor 112 may limit the sharpness of tip 124. Accordingly, variation 130 in Fig. 7 shows an alternate distal end 132 which defines channel 138 for receiving inner conductor 92 but which also defines access channel 140 extending from a side surface of distal end 132 to channel 138. Access channel 140 allows for access to inner conductor 92 to affix it to distal end 132 while allowing for tapered end 134 to terminate at sharpened tip 136. Although a single channel is shown in this variation, multiple channels may be incorporated into the design at various locations.

[0074] While most of the variations described above are related to dipole antenna assemblies, Fig. 8 shows monopole antenna assembly 150 made at least in part according to the present invention. As shown, there may be a single radiating portion 152 which preferably has a length corresponding to a length of $\lambda/2$, rather than $\lambda/4$, of the radiation being transmitted through assembly 150. As above, monopole assembly 150 may apply a compressive load upon junction member 154 between radiating portion 152 and proximal end 156. The principles of having an antenna length correspond to a length of $\lambda/2$ or $\lambda/4$, as well as having tapered distal ends or tips on the distal portion, may be utilized not only with antennas assembled using compression methods, but these principles may be used with any of the variations described herein.

[0075] To improve the energy focus of an antenna assembly, an electrical choke may also be used to contain returning currents to the distal end of the antenna. Generally, the choke may be disposed on the antenna proximally of the radiating section. The choke is preferably placed over a dielectric material which may be disposed over the antenna. The choke is preferably a conductive layer and may be further covered by a tubing or coating to force the conductive layer to

conform to the underlying antenna, thereby forcing an electrical connection (or short) more distally and closer to the radiating section. The electrical connection between the choke and the underlying antenna may also be achieved by other connection methods such as soldering, welding, brazing, crimping, use of conductive adhesives, etc. The following description is directed towards the use of a choke on a compression antenna variation for illustration purposes only; however, the choke may also be used with any of the antenna variations described below.

[0076] Fig. 9A shows a side view of a variation on pre-stressed antenna assembly 160 with an electrical choke and Fig. 9B shows cross-sectioned side view 9B-9B from Fig. 9A. Similar to the antenna assemblies above, assembly 160 shows radiating portion 162 electrically attached via feedline (or shaft) 164 to a proximally located coupler 166. Detail 174 of radiating portion 162 and detail 180 of feedline 164 are described in further detail below. Radiating portion 162 is shown with sealant layer 168 coated over section 162. Electrical choke 172 is shown partially disposed over a distal section of feedline 164 to form electrical choke portion 170, which is preferably located proximally of radiating portion 162. Details 176, 178 of choke portion 170 are described in further detail below.

[0077] Fig. 10 shows detailed view 174 from Fig. 9B of a variation on a pre-stressed antenna section. As seen, distal radiating portion 190 and proximal radiating portion 192 are located in their respective positions about junction member 194, which in this variation is shown as a stepped member. Proximal radiating portion 192 is further shown having outer conductor 196 preferably disposed concentrically about inner conductor 198 with dielectric 200 placed in-between outer and inner conductors 196, 198 for insulation. Inner conductor 198 may be fed through junction member 194 and into distal radiating portion 190 to be affixed by weld or solder 202 to distal radiating portion 190 via access channel 204, which is shown to extend from a distal end of inner conductor 198 to an outer surface of portion 190. As described above, inner conductor 198 may be heated to longitudinally expand it prior to affixing it to distal portion 190. As inner conductor 198 cools, a tensile force is imparted in inner conductor 198 which draws the distal and proximal portions 190, 192 together longitudinally. In turn, this imparts a compressive force upon the radial portions of junction member

194, preferably at the junction-to-distal portion interface 206. Optionally, dielectric layer 208, which may be a ceramic material such as Al_2O_3 , may be coated over the radiating antenna portion. Moreover, a lubricious layer such as Teflon, may also be coated over the antenna portion as well along with dielectric layer 208. A further sealant layer 210 may optionally be coated over dielectric layer 208 as well. Sealant layer 210 may be made from a variety of thermoplastic polymers, e.g., heat shrink polymers, such as polyethylene (PE), polyethylene terephthalate (PET), polytetrafluoroethylene (PTFE), fluorinated ethylene propylene (FEP), perfluoroalkoxy (PFA), chlorotrifluoroethylene (CTFE), ethylene chlorotrifluoroethylene (ECTFE), and ethylene tetrafluoroethylene (ETFE). The description is directed towards the use of dielectric and sealant layers on a compression antenna variation for illustration purposes only; however, the uses of dielectric and sealant layers may also be used with any of the antenna variations described below.

[0078] Fig. 11 shows detailed view 176 from Fig. 9B of a variation on the transition to electrical choke portion 170. Electrical choke 172 may be disposed proximally of sealant layer 210 or proximal radiating portion 192. Although shown with a gap between choke 172 and sealant layer 210 in this variation, the two may touch or overlap slightly. Fig. 12 shows a more detailed view 178 of the various layers which may comprise electrical choke 172. In this variation, a first inner dielectric layer 220 may be disposed over the antenna assembly. The first inner dielectric layer 220 may be made from any of the various thermoplastic polymers, ceramics, or other coatings, as described above. A second inner dielectric layer 222 may optionally be disposed over first inner dielectric layer 220 and may be made from the same or similar material as first inner dielectric layer 220. Conductive layer 224 may then be disposed over the dielectric layers. Conductive layer 224 is preferably a conductive coating, a conductive foil material, e.g., copper foil, or a metal tubing and electrically contacts outer conductor 196 at some location along choke 172 proximally of radiating portion 162.

[0079] Variation 160 illustrates electrical contact between conductive layer 224 and outer conductor 196 in detail 178 occurring at the proximal location of electrical choke portion 170, but choke 172 may be formed without forcing

contact between outer conductor 196 with layer 224 provided the length of choke 172 is chosen appropriately. For instance, choke 172 having a sufficiently long length, e.g., a length of $\lambda/2$, may be used without having to force contact between the layers. Outer dielectric layer 226 may be disposed upon conductive layer 224. Outer dielectric layer 226 may also be made of any of the various polymers as described above and is preferably a heat shrinkable layer that may force conductive layer 224 to conform more closely to the underlying layers to not only force a better electrical connection, but also to reduce the overall diameter of the antenna section. Fig. 13 shows detailed view 180 from Fig. 9B of a variation on the feedline. As shown, feedline 164 may be a simple coaxial cable where outer conductor 196, inner conductor 198, and dielectric 200 extend throughout the feedline. Outer dielectric layer 226 may also extend down over feedline 164 and even over the entire antenna assembly.

[0080] Further steps may optionally be taken to further increase the strength of an antenna assembly by altering any of the layers, such as sealant layer 210 or any of the other heatshrink layers discussed above. Fig. 14 shows one example of antenna section 230 where wires or strands 236 may be formed within or on the layers 232 to add strength. The wires 236 may be formed within the layer 232 and are preferably orientated longitudinally along the length of antenna section 230 such that the bending strength of the antenna is increased. The layers 232 may be formed over outer conductor 234, as described above, and wire 236 may be made of any high-strength material, e.g., Kevlar, metals, etc. Metal wires may be used provided they are well insulated by layers 232.

Antenna Assembly Via Mechanical Fastening

[0081] Aside from using a compressive load to increase antenna strength, as described above, alternative methods may be employed for increasing antenna strength to withstand direct insertion into tissue. An alternative variation may include assembling an antenna using mechanical fastening methods. Fig. 15, for example, shows a cross-sectioned variation of a mechanically threaded interface or "screw-on" variation 240 as an exploded assembly. As seen, proximal portion 242 may be connected to distal portion 244 by using a junction member 246 having first and second junction mating sections 252, 254, respectively.

[0082] Junction member 246 is preferably comprised of any of the dielectric materials as described above. Alternatively, a dielectric coating or layer may also be applied to the inside of channels 248, 260 which contacts junction member 246. First and second mating sections 252, 254 may be threaded 256, 258, respectively, such that the thread pitch on each section 252, 254 is opposed to each other, i.e., the pitch angle of threading 256 may be opposite to the pitch angle of threading 258. Alternatively, the thread pitch on each section 252, 254 may be configured to be angled similarly for ease of antenna assembly. Proximal portion 242 may have a receiving cavity or channel 248 which is threaded 250 at a predetermined pitch to correspond to the pitch and angle of the threading 256 on first mating section 252. Likewise, distal portion 244 may have a receiving cavity or channel 260 which is threaded 262 at a predetermined pitch to correspond to the pitch and angle of the threading 258 on second mating section 254. Having opposed pitch angles may be done to ensure a secure fit or joint when variation 240 is assembled by screwing proximal portion 242 and distal portion 244 together onto junction member 246.

[0083] A further screw-on variation 270 is shown in Fig. 16. Here, proximal portion 272 may have a proximal mating section 274 which is threaded 276 at a predetermined pitch and angle to correspondingly screw into distal portion 282 via threaded receiving channel 278. Channel 278 preferably has threading 280 which matches threading 276 on mating section 274 to ensure a tight fit and a secure joint. Although variation 270 shows a mating section 274 on proximal portion 272 and receiving channel 278 in distal portion 282, a mating section may instead be located on distal portion 282 for insertion into a corresponding receiving channel located in proximal portion 272. Preferably, a dielectric coating or layer 284 is applied either to the inside of channel 278 or on the outer surface of mating section 274 as shown (or upon both) to prevent contact between proximal and distal portions 272, 282, respectively.

Antenna Assembly Via Overlap

[0084] Another variation on assembling an antenna is by use of overlapping or interfitting joints to attach proximal and distal portions together. Fig. 17 shows a crimped or overlapping variation 290. Proximal portion 292 is

preferably attached to distal tip or portion 294 by inner conductor 302 and by having a distal end section of the proximal portion 292 crimped and portion 294 maintained in position via a molded material 300, which is also preferably dielectric such as a biocompatible thermoset plastic or polymer (including any of the dielectric materials discussed herein). The distal end section, i.e., crimped dielectric 296 and crimped outer conductor 298, is preferably crimped or tapered in a reduced diameter towards the distal end while a portion of dielectric 296 near crimped outer conductor 298 may be partially removed to allow for material 300 to be formed within, as shown in the figure. While the inner conductor 302 is held between proximal and distal portions 292, 294, respectively, the moldable material 300 may be injection molded within a die or preform holding the assembly to form a unitary structure with both portions 292, 294. Material 300 may also be shaped into various forms depending upon the desired application, such as a tapering distal end, as shown in the Fig. 17.

[0085] Fig. 18 shows another variation 310 where proximal portion 312 is preferably configured to receive and hold distal portion 314. Proximal portion 312 may have a distal section of dielectric material 316 removed partially to create a receiving channel 318 within portion 312. Distal portion 314 may be snugly placed within this channel 318 such that portion 314 is partially within and partially out of dielectric material 316, as shown. A layer 320 of the dielectric material 316 may be left between outer conductor 322 and distal portion 314 to form an insulative barrier between the two. Alternatively, dielectric layer 320 may be formed of a different material than dielectric 316. To further aid in antenna 310 insertion into tissue, the distal end of distal portion 314, as well as the distal end of outer conductor 322, may be tapered to facilitate insertion. The overlapping segment between proximal and distal portions 312, 314, respectively, may be varied depending upon the desired bending resistance and desired strength of antenna 310.

[0086] Fig. 19 shows a further variation 330 of an overlapping joint for assembling the antenna. Proximal portion 332 preferably has a mating channel 340 in the distal end of the portion 332 for receiving mating section 338 of distal portion 334. This variation 330 preferably has an overlapping junction member 336 which may be slipped over mating section 338 prior to insertion into channel

340. Overlapping junction member 336 is preferably a dielectric material and fits snugly between proximal portion 332 and mating section 338 to form an overlapping joint when the inner conductor is attached to distal portion 334, as described above.

[0087] Fig. 20 shows an antenna variation where different methods of overlapping attachments may be utilized. Distal portion 350 is shown having a cylindrical interfitting member 358. The portion 350 may be inserted via member 358 into a corresponding receiving channel 356 preferably defined in the outer conductor of proximal portion 354. An end view of proximal portion 354 in Fig. 21A shows channel 356 in this variation for receiving a cylindrically shaped member 358.

[0088] Another variation is shown in distal portion 352 where rather than having a conical interfitting member, separate pins or dowels 360 may be used to extend into receiving channels 356' of proximal portion 354'. These pins 360 may be integral with distal portion 352 or they may be separate members inserted and held in distal portion 352; in either case, pins 360 are preferably made of a hard dielectric material or a metal sufficiently coated with a dielectric material for insulation. As seen in Fig. 21B, which is an end view of proximal portion 354', channels 356' are shown located every 90° about portion 354'. Although four pins are used in this variation, any number of pins may be used ranging from two to several depending upon the desired strength of the antenna assembly. To support such a plurality of pins, it may be desirable to have proximal portions 354, 354' with an outer conductor having a thickness ranging from 0.005 to 0.010 inches.

[0089] Fig. 22 shows an antenna assembly with an overlapping interference-fitted variation 370. As seen, proximal portion 372 may be attached to distal portion 374 by a junction member 376 which is preferably interference-fitted, i.e., frictionally-fitted, between both portions 372, 374. The junction member 376 may have a first and a second section 382, 384, respectively, which preferably has a diameter D_2 . Receiving channel 378 in proximal portion 372 preferably has a diameter D_1 and receiving channel 380 in distal portion 374 also has a diameter D_1 or some diameter less than D_2 . Accordingly, diameter D_1 is some value less than D_2 such that an interference fit is created between junction

376 and portions 372 and 374. Accordingly, distal portion 374 is frictionally held to proximal portion 372.

[0090] Fig. 23 shows another interfitting variation 390 utilizing a junction member 396 which is preferably held between proximal portion 392 and distal portion 394 by multiple pins 398, 402 which may be received in channels 400, 404, respectively. Accordingly, as discussed above, any number of pins 398 extending from proximal portion 392 may be inserted into corresponding channels 400, and any number of pins 402 extending from distal portion 394 may likewise be inserted into corresponding channels 404.

[0091] Fig. 24 shows an overlapping and interfitting variation 410 where proximal portion 412 has receiving channel 416 for receiving distal portion 414. Within channel 416, there may be a plurality of depressions 418 defined in the surface of the outer conductor. These depressions 418 are preferably shaped to have a locking configuration, such as a right triangle shape, when projections 420, which are located radially on distal portion 414, are inserted into and mated to depressions 418. Projections 420 are preferably protrusions which extend from a surface of distal portion 414 and are preferably radially disposed on the outer surface. Also, any number of projections 420, e.g., at least two to several, may be utilized but are preferably equally radially spaced from one another depending upon the desired strength of the overlapping joint. To facilitate insertion of distal portion 414 into channel 416, projections 420 may be disposed on the ends of a number of corresponding support members 422 flexibly attached to distal portion 414. Support members 422 would allow projections 420 to be retracted at least partially into the outer surface of distal portion 414 during insertion, and when distal portion 414 is fully inserted into channel 416, projections 420 may then be allowed to expand into and intimately mate with the depressions 418 such that distal portion 414 is held fixed relative to proximal portion 412. A dielectric material may be coated or sprayed within channel 416 or on distal portion 414 to insulate between the two portions 412, 414.

[0092] Fig. 25 shows a further variation 430 of that shown in Fig. 24. Proximal portion 432 may be attached to distal portion 434 by an overlapping joint where mating section 438 on distal portion 434 may be inserted into receiving channel 436. Once inserted, distal portion 434 may be held to proximal

portion 432 by projections 442 intimately mating within corresponding depressions 444. Distal portion 434 may be made entirely of a dielectric material; alternatively, mating section 438 may be made at least partly of a dielectric while the remainder of distal portion 434 may be metallic. To further ensure a strong joint, depressions 444 may have a number of access channels 440 preferably extending radially from depressions 444 defined in the surface of channel 436 to an outer surface of proximal portion 432. Access channels 440 may be used to provide access to projections 442 (once mated within depressions 444) for further fixation to proximal portion 432 by welding, soldering, brazing, or by applying adhesives.

Alternate Methods of Tip or Distal Portion Attachment

[0093] Aside from various methods of assembling microwave antennas, there are also a variety of methods for attaching the tip or distal radiating portion to a remainder of the assembly. The various methods described below may be used in any of the assembly variations discussed herein depending upon the desired antenna assembly characteristics.

[0094] Fig. 26 shows a partial assembly of a microwave antenna having a distal portion 454 which may be screwed onto the proximal portion 452 via the inner conductor 456. The distal end portion of inner conductor 456 is preferably threaded 458 on an outer surface. Correspondingly, the receiving channel 460 within distal portion 454 is likewise threaded to receive the threaded portion 458 of inner conductor 456. During assembly, distal portion 454 may be screwed onto proximal portion 452 by inner conductor 458. Accordingly, the force with which the proximal and distal portions 452, 454 are held together may be varied by the amount and degree distal portion 454 is screwed or advanced onto inner conductor 456, thereby allowing the rigidity or strength of the antenna to be varied according to a desired use or application. In this variation, distal portion 454 may be made of a non-metallic material, e.g., a polymer, and attached directly to proximal portion 452; alternatively, distal portion 454 may also be made of a metallic material and used in conjunction with a dielectric junction member, as described above.

[0095] Fig. 27 shows another variation for assembling a distal portion in an isometric exploded view of splittable distal portion 470. The distal portion 470 may be comprised of a splittable distal portion having a first half 472 and a second half 474. Although shown split into two halves 472, 474, distal portion 470 may be split into numerous portions, e.g., three or more. Within the adjoining surfaces, anchoring channel 476 may be defined to receive inner conductor 480 and may have a portion of channel 476 configured or enlarged to receive an anchoring element 482 for holding the inner conductor 480 distal end within distal portion 470. Inner conductor 480 preferably has an anchoring element 482 formed on a distal end of inner conductor 480 by rounding or flattening the distal end into anchoring element 482 or attaching a separate anchoring mechanism onto the distal end. Once inner conductor 480 and anchoring element 482 are positioned within anchoring channel 476, both halves 472, 474 may be attached together, thereby fixedly holding anchoring element 482 therewithin. When distal portion halves 472, 474 are attached to one another, they may be aligned and positioned relative to each other by a number of alignment projections 478 on one or both halves 472, 474 and the halves may then be held to one another by any number of methods, e.g., welding, brazing, soldering, adhesives, snap-fits, etc.

[0096] Another variation for attaching the distal portion is shown in Fig. 28, which is an exploded side view of multi-sectioned portion 490. The distal portion may be comprised of multiple sections which may be interfitted to form the distal portion. Thus, while proximal portion 492 and junction member 494 (which may or may not be used in this variation) are assembled as in some of the other variations, the distal portion may have a first section 496 through which inner conductor 506 may be passed through via access channel 502. Once the distal tip of inner conductor 506 is passed through junction member 494 and access channel 502, it may then be attached to first section 496 at the end of access channel 502 by any of the attachment methods described above. First section 496 may then be assembled with second section 498 by interfitting mating section 500 into receiving channel 504. The use of a multi-sectioned portion such as that shown in portion 490 may enable one to first attach the proximal portion with the distal portion and variably alter the tip of the distal portion according to a desired application.

[0097] To further aid in tip or distal portion attachment to the antenna assembly, various distal portions may be used to facilitate assembly and use in a patient. As previously described, the distal tip is preferably tapered and terminates at a tip to facilitate antenna insertion into tissue with minimal resistance. Also, attaching the inner conductor to the distal portion may be facilitated by an access channel defined in the distal portion so that the inner conductor may be attached by welding, soldering, etc. within the distal portion. To further facilitate this assembly process, the distal tip may be formed into an arcuate or curved face terminating into a tip, as seen in Fig. 29. As shown in the cross-sectional side view of alternate tip 510, it may have the arcuate or curved face 512 sloping distally such that tip 514 is formed off-center from the longitudinal axis defined by the antenna to which alternate tip 510 may be attached. Accordingly, inner conductor 518 may be routed through access channel 516 and then attached by any of the methods described to alternate tip 510 thereby allowing tip 514 to be sharpened as necessary and allowing an access channel 516 to be maintained along the longitudinal axis of the antenna for ease of assembly.

Alternate Distal Portion Attachments

[0098] As discussed above, the energy with a wavelength, λ , is transmitted down a microwave antenna and is subsequently radiated into the surrounding medium. In operation, microwave energy having a wavelength, λ , is transmitted through the antenna assembly along both proximal and distal radiating portions. This energy is then radiated into the surrounding medium. The length of the antenna for efficient radiation may be dependent at least on the effective wavelength, λ_{eff} , which is dependent upon the dielectric properties of the medium being radiated into. Energy having the effective wavelength radiates and the surrounding medium is subsequently heated. An antenna assembly through which microwave energy is transmitted at a wavelength, λ , may have differing effective wavelengths, λ_{eff} , depending upon whether the energy is radiated into, e.g., liver tissue, as opposed to, e.g., breast tissue. Also affecting the effective wavelength, λ_{eff} , are coatings which may be disposed over the antenna assembly.

[0099] Accordingly, various distal portions having varying diameters are shown in Figs. 30 to 32. Fig. 30, for instance, shows a representative antenna 520 having a constant diameter from proximal portion 522 to distal portion 524 while covered with an optional heatshrink 526, as described above, for comparison purposes. Fig. 31 shows antenna 530 having distal portion 532 with a larger diameter than proximal portion 522. Heatshrink 526 in this variation may be desirable to smooth the transition between the different diameters. On the other hand, Fig. 32 shows antenna 540 having distal portion 542 with a diameter that is smaller than that of proximal portion 522. Having heatshrink 526 in this variation may also be desirable to likewise smooth the transition between the different diameters. Varying the diameters of the distal portion may change the radiative properties of the effective wavelength in addition to the different medium types being radiated into. Accordingly, the diameter of the distal portion may be varied to give a desired radiative effect for different tissue types. Besides the diameter of the distal portion, the thicknesses of heatshrink 526 or any of the other dielectric and sealant layers, as described above, may also be varied accordingly in addition to the distal portion diameter. Although only two variations are shown in Figs. 31 and 32, the distal tips may have a variety of configurations; for instance, it may be stepped, ramped, tapered, etc., depending upon the desired radiative effects.

Antenna Deployment

[0100] As described above, the microwave antenna may be inserted directly into the tissue and into the lesion to be treated. However, during insertion, the antenna may encounter resistance from some areas of tissue, particularly in some tissue found, e.g., in the breast. When the microwave antenna encounters resistance, if force were applied, tissue damage may result or the target tissue may be inadvertently pushed away due to the differential density of the target tissue relative to the surrounding tissue. Therefore, RF energy may also be utilized with the microwave antenna for facilitating deployment within the tissue.

[0101] In use, the RF energy may be simply left on the entire time the antenna is advanced through the tissue, or it may be applied or turned on only as needed as the antenna encounters resistance from the tissue. With the RF energy

activated, the antenna may be further advanced utilizing the RF energy to cut through the obstructive tissue. Once the antenna has been desirably positioned within a lesion or region of tissue, the RF energy, if on, may be switched off and the microwave energy may be switched on to effect treatment.

[0102] One variation of antenna assembly 550 is shown in Fig. 33. Assembly 550 may use RF energy at the distal tip of the antenna as a cutting mechanism during antenna deployment. The microwave antenna 552 is preferably covered with some insulative material 554 along most of its length, but distal tip 556 may be uninsulated such that the RF energy may be applied thereto through the inner conductor. To utilize the RF energy cutting mechanism at the distal tip, the inner conductor may be made from Nitinol, Tungsten, stainless steel, or some other conductive metal.

[0103] Antenna 552, through cable 558, may be electrically connected to an RF generator 564 which provides the RF energy to distal tip 556 during placement and positioning of antenna 552 within the tissue or lesion. After antenna 552 has been desirably positioned within the lesion, connector 560 may be disconnected from RF cable 562 and attached to a microwave generator 568 via microwave cable 566 to provide the microwave energy for effecting treatment to the tissue.

[0104] Alternatively, given the small amount of surface area of distal tip 556, a low power RF generator may be utilized and can be built into an integral unit 568 along with the microwave generator. Alternatively, the optional RF generator 564 may be physically separated from the microwave generator and may be electrically connected as a separate unit, as shown.

[0105] Another variation on antenna assemblies utilizing RF energy is shown in Figs. 34A and 34B. In this variation, antenna assembly 570 may have antenna body 572 define a lumen 574 therethrough within which inner conductor 576 may be slidably positioned. During insertion of the antenna into the tissue, distal tip 578 may be used to pierce through the tissue, as seen in Fig. 34A. When resistance is encountered, inner conductor 576 may be advanced distally through lumen 574 to extend at least partially out of distal tip 578. To facilitate movement of inner conductor 576 within antenna 572, the inner surface of lumen 576 may be coated with a lubricious material or the outer surface of inner conductor 576 may

alternatively be coated. If inner conductor 576 is coated, a distal end portion of inner conductor 576 may be left exposed such that RF energy may be delivered through the inner conductor 576 at this exposed end. To optimize the microwave radiation transmitted from antenna assembly 570, electrical choke 573 may be disposed partially over antenna body 572, as shown. Electrical choke 573 may be made and utilized in any of the variations as described in detail above.

[0106] Aside from the illustrations of possible antenna deployment methods and devices described above, other variations for deployment and insertion into tissue may be utilized. Potential other methods and devices for antenna deployment and insertion may be found in co-pending U.S. Patent Application entitled "Microwave Antenna Having A Curved Configuration" filed September 15, 2002, which is commonly owned and is incorporated herein by reference in its entirety.

Methods of Use

[0107] In using a microwave antenna, several different methods may be utilized. Fig. 35A shows an isometric view of one variation 580 in which a single antenna 582 may be utilized within the tissue. Fig. 35B shows an end view of the antenna 582 and an example of a possible resulting ablation field or region 584 using that single antenna 582. In such a case, antenna 582 may be positioned directly within the tissue to be treated.

[0108] Figs. 36A and 36B show another variation 590 in which a single antenna 592 may be positioned in one of several locations 592' and/or 592'' about the tissue to be treated. Antenna 592 may be activated in a first position, then removed and repositioned in a second position 592' and activated, and then removed and again repositioned in a third position 592'' and again activated, and so on. The order of positioning, relative placement, and depth of insertion of the antenna may be sequential or varied, and the number of times the antenna is positioned or repositioned within the tissue may also be varied depending upon the desired ablation effects. This example shows antenna 592 being positioned three times for illustrative purposes but the invention is not so limited. Fig. 36B shows an end view of the overall resulting ablation field 594 due to the overlapping individual ablation fields.

[0109] Another variation for antenna use is shown in Figs. 37A and 37B. This variation shows antenna assembly 600 in which multiple antennas may be utilized in combination with one another. This example shows first, second, and third antennas 602, 604, 606, respectively, which may be used simultaneously, although any number of antennas may be used depending upon the desired ablation effects. Additionally, antennas 602, 604, 606 are shown in this example positioned in a triangular pattern; however, any variety of patterns may be utilized depending upon the number of antennas used and the desired ablation effects. In this variation, all three antennas 602, 604, 606 may be turned on simultaneously to effect an overall larger ablation region. Fig. 37B shows an end view of an example of a combined ablation field 608 which may result when all antennas are on simultaneously. As seen, the individual antennas may combine to form a larger and more uniform ablation field 608.

[0110] In using multiple antennas simultaneously, the energy supplied to the antennas may alternatively be cycled or pulsed to effect a combined ablation field. Rather than using antennas 602, 604, 606 turned on simultaneously, they may instead be energized cyclically through the use of multiple channels from a single unit by multiplexing and cycling the output. This may eliminate the use of multiple generators since each antenna would typically require the use of a generator. The effects of multiple channel generators, which typically requires the use of multiple generators, may be accomplished by using a single generator and may result in a much lower power consumption. For instance, a three channel 100 W generator system would otherwise require about three times the power, i.e., 300 W, if used by a single channel system if the power were produced for each channel simultaneously.

[0111] Fig. 38 schematically shows channel splitter assembly 610 which may be used to create multiple channels by using a single source with multiplexing. A single microwave generator module 618 having, e.g., a 100 W output, may create a single channel A. The single channel A may be switched between several separate channel outputs A_1 to A_N created by channel splitter 612. Any number of multiple outputs may be used depending upon the desired number of channels and the desired effects. In use, the output may be cycled through the range of outputs 616 through multiple channels A_1 to A_N or in any other manner

depending upon the ablation field to be created. Moreover, the rate of cycling may range anywhere from several microseconds to several seconds over a treatment period of several minutes or longer.

[0112] Controller 614, which is preferably in electrical communication with channel splitter 612 may be used for several purposes. It may be used to control the cycling rate as well as the order of channels in which the output is cycled through. Moreover, controller 614 may be an automatic system or set by the technician or physician. An automatic system may be configured to detect the electrical connection to the antenna and to control the delivery of the energy to the antenna. The detection may be achieved by either a passive or active component in the system which may monitor reflections from the antenna to determine whether a proper connection is present. A controller set by the technician or physician may be configured to require manual initiation for energy delivery to begin.

[0113] The applications of the antenna assemblies and methods of making the assemblies discussed above are not limited to microwave antennas used for hyperthermic, ablation, and coagulation treatments but may include any number of further microwave antenna applications. Modification of the above-described assemblies and methods for carrying out the invention, and variations of aspects of the invention that are obvious to those of skill in the art are intended to be within the scope of the claims.

CLAIMS

We claim:

1. A microwave antenna assembly for applying microwave energy therapy comprising:
 - a proximal portion having an inner conductor and an outer conductor, each extending therethrough, the inner conductor disposed within the outer conductor; and
 - a distal portion attached to the proximal portion such that the inner conductor extends at least partially therein,wherein each of the proximal and distal portions are configured to mate together such that the proximal and distal portions are fixedly positioned relative to one another by a mechanically engaging joint coupling the distal portion to the proximal portion.
2. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 1 further comprising a junction member disposed between the proximal and distal portions.
3. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 2 wherein the junction member comprises a dielectric material.
4. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 1 wherein the distal portion has a tapered distal end.
5. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 1 wherein the proximal and distal portions are adapted to radiate upon transmission of radiation through the antenna assembly.
6. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 5 wherein the proximal and distal portions have a length which is proportional to an effective wavelength of the radiation transmitted by the antenna assembly.
7. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 1 wherein the distal portion comprises a metal or dielectric material.

8. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 1 wherein the distal portion is attached to the inner conductor by a method selected from the group consisting of welding, brazing, soldering, and adhesives.

9. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 1 further comprising a dielectric coating disposed at least partially over the antenna assembly.

10. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 9 wherein the dielectric coating comprises a ceramic.

11. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 1 further comprising a sealant coating disposed at least partially over the antenna assembly.

12. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 1 further comprising a conductive layer which is located proximally of the distal portion and is in electrical communication with the outer conductor.

13. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 1 further comprising a dielectric material disposed between the proximal and distal portions.

14. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 1 wherein the distal portion comprises at least a first section which interfits with a second section in a mated joint such that the first and the second section forms an integral distal portion.

15. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 1 wherein the mechanically engaging joint comprises a threaded interface.

16. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 15 wherein the threaded interface comprises a junction member having a threaded distal and proximal section.

17. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 1 wherein the mechanically engaging joint comprises an interference-fit between each of the portions.

18. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 1 wherein the mechanically engaging joint comprises a plurality of pins extending between the portions.

19. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 1 wherein the mechanically engaging joint comprises a plurality of projections radially disposed about the proximal or distal portion.

20. A kit for applying microwave energy therapy comprising:
a microwave antenna assembly as described in claim 1; and
a power source for supplying power to the microwave antenna assembly.

21. The kit of claim 20 wherein the power source comprises a generator.

22. A microwave antenna assembly for applying microwave energy therapy comprising:

a proximal portion having an inner conductor and an outer conductor, each extending therethrough, the inner conductor disposed within the outer conductor;
and

a distal portion attached to the proximal portion such that the inner conductor extends at least partially therein,

wherein each of the proximal and distal portions are configured to mate together such that the proximal and distal portions are fixedly positioned relative to one another by attachment means coupling the distal portion to the proximal portion.

23. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 22 wherein the attachment means comprises a threaded interface.

24. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 22 wherein the attachment means comprises an interference-fit between each of the portions.

25. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 22 wherein the attachment means comprises a plurality of pins extending between the portions.

26. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 22 wherein the attachment means comprises a plurality of projections radially disposed about the proximal or distal portion.

27. A microwave antenna assembly for applying microwave energy therapy comprising:

a proximal portion having an inner conductor and an outer conductor, each extending therethrough, the inner conductor disposed within the outer conductor;

a junction member having a longitudinal thickness and disposed distally of the proximal portion such that the inner conductor extends therethrough; and

a distal portion disposed distally of the junction member such that the inner conductor extends at least partially therein, and

wherein the distal portion and proximal portion apply a compressive force on at least a portion of the junction member.

28. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 27 wherein the proximal portion has a length corresponding to a distance of one-quarter wavelength of radiation transmittable through the antenna assembly.

29. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 27 wherein the proximal portion is adapted to radiate along the length upon transmission of the radiation.

30. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 27 wherein the junction member comprises a dielectric material.

31. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 27 wherein the junction member has a radial thickness which is uniform about a longitudinal axis as defined by the junction member.

32. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 27 wherein the junction member has a radial thickness which is non-uniform about a longitudinal axis as defined by the junction member.

33. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 32 wherein the junction member is stepped such that the member comprises at least two different radial thicknesses.

34. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 27 wherein the distal portion has a tapered distal end.

35. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 27 wherein the distal portion has an actual length defined along an outer surface of the distal portion such that a cumulative distance of the actual length and the thickness of the junction member corresponds to a distance of one-quarter wavelength of radiation transmittable through the antenna assembly.

36. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 27 wherein the distal portion comprises a metal.

37. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 27 wherein the inner conductor extends through the distal portion.

38. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 27 wherein the distal portion defines a channel extending from the inner conductor disposed within the distal portion to an outer surface of the distal portion.

39. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 27 wherein the distal portion is attached to the inner conductor by a method selected from the group consisting of welding, brazing, soldering, and adhesives.

40. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 27 wherein when the antenna is under a state of zero external stress, the inner conductor is in a state of tension and is attached to the distal portion such that the distal portion applies the compressive force against the junction member.

41. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 27 further comprising a dielectric coating disposed at least partially over the antenna assembly.

42. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 27 further comprising a sealant coating disposed at least partially over the antenna assembly.

43. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 42 wherein the sealant coating comprises a thermoplastic polymer.

44. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 27 further comprising a conductive layer which is located proximally of the distal portion and is in electrical communication with the outer conductor.

45. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 44 wherein the conductive layer is selected from the group consisting of conductive coatings, metallic foil, and metal tubing.

46. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 44 further comprising a first dielectric layer disposed at least partially between the conductive layer and the proximal portion.

47. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 46 further comprising a second dielectric layer disposed at least partially about the conductive layer.

48. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 44 wherein the conductive layer is disposed at least partially about a coaxial feedline connecting the antenna assembly to a generator.

49. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 48 further comprising a dielectric layer disposed between the conductive layer and the proximal portion.

50. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 27 wherein the distal portion has an actual length defined along an outer surface of the distal portion such that the actual length corresponds to a distance of one-half wavelength of radiation transmittable through the antenna assembly.

51. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 50 wherein the inner conductor is in a state of tension and is attached to the distal portion such that the distal portion applies the compressive force against the junction member.

52. A method of manufacturing a microwave antenna assembly for applying microwave energy therapy, comprising:

providing a proximal portion having an inner conductor and an outer conductor, each extending therethrough, the inner conductor disposed within the outer conductor;

placing a junction member adjacent to a distal end of the proximal portion such that the inner conductor extends through a channel defined in the junction member;

placing a proximal end of a distal portion adjacent to a distal end of the junction member such that the inner conductor extends within a channel defined within the distal portion; and

affixing the inner conductor to the distal portion such that the proximal portion and the distal portion apply a compressive force on at least a portion of the junction member.

53. The method of claim 52 further comprising heating the inner conductor prior to affixing the inner conductor to the distal portion.

54. The method of claim 53 wherein affixing the inner conductor to the distal portion comprises a method selected from the group consisting of welding, brazing, and soldering the inner conductor to the distal portion.

55. The method of claim 52 wherein the proximal portion comprises a dielectric material disposed between the inner conductor and the outer conductor.

56. The method of claim 52 wherein the proximal portion has a length corresponding to a distance of one-quarter wavelength of radiation transmittable through the antenna assembly.

57. The method of claim 52 wherein the junction member comprises a dielectric material.

58. The method of claim 57 wherein the junction member comprises a ceramic material.

59. The method of claim 52 wherein the distal portion has an actual length defined along an outer surface of the distal portion such that a cumulative distance of the actual length and a thickness of the junction member corresponds to a distance of one-quarter wavelength of radiation transmittable through the antenna assembly.

60. The method of claim 59 wherein the distal portion, the proximal portion, and the junction member are adapted to radiate along the cumulative length upon transmission of the radiation.

61. The method of claim 52 further comprising affixing the inner conductor to the distal portion such that the inner conductor is attached to the distal portion such that the inner conductor is under tension.

62. The method of claim 52 further comprising disposing a dielectric coating at least partially over the antenna assembly.

63. The method of claim 52 further comprising disposing a sealant coating at least partially over the antenna assembly.

64. The method of claim 52 further comprising disposing a conductive layer on the antenna assembly proximally of the distal portion such that the conductive layer is in electrical communication with the outer conductor.

65. A microwave antenna assembly for applying microwave energy therapy comprising:

a proximal portion having an inner conductor and an outer conductor, each extending therethrough, the inner conductor disposed within the outer conductor; and

a distal portion attached to the proximal portion such that the inner conductor extends at least partially therein,

wherein the proximal and distal portions are mated together by a mechanically threaded interface, each of the portions having a threaded surface wherein the threaded surfaces are mateable.

66. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 65 further comprising a junction member having a threaded distal and proximal section and being positionable between the proximal and distal portions.

67. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 65 wherein the proximal portion comprises a threaded distal section and the distal portion comprises a threaded proximal section, wherein the threaded proximal section comprising male threads are configured to receive the threaded distal section comprising female threads.

68. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 65 wherein the proximal portion comprises a threaded distal section and the distal portion comprises a

threaded proximal section, wherein the threaded distal section comprising male threads are configured to receive the threaded proximal section comprising female threads.

69. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 66 wherein the junction member comprises a dielectric material.

70. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 65 wherein the distal portion has a tapered distal end.

71. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 65 further comprising a dielectric coating disposed at least partially over the antenna assembly.

72. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 65 further comprising a sealant coating disposed at least partially over the antenna assembly.

73. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 65 further comprising a dielectric material disposed between the proximal and distal portions.

74. A kit for applying microwave energy therapy comprising:
a microwave antenna assembly as described in claim 65; and
a power source for supplying power to the microwave antenna assembly.

75. The kit of claim 74 wherein the power source comprises a generator.

76. A microwave antenna assembly for applying microwave energy therapy comprising:

a proximal portion having an inner conductor and an outer conductor, each extending therethrough, the inner conductor disposed within the outer conductor;
and

a distal portion attached to the proximal portion such that the inner conductor extends at least partially therein,

wherein the proximal and distal portions are mated together by a mechanically overlapping joint.

77. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 76 wherein the proximal portion is configured to receive and frictionally hold a proximal end of the distal portion.

78. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 76 wherein the distal portion is configured to receive and frictionally hold a distal end of the proximal portion.

79. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 76 wherein the overlapping joint comprises a plurality of pins extending between the proximal and distal portions, each of the proximal and distal portions defining a plurality of corresponding holes for respectively receiving the plurality of pins.

80. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 76 wherein the distal portion comprises a plurality of projections radially disposed on an outer surface of the distal portion, and wherein the proximal portion comprises a plurality of depressions radially defined in an inner surface of the proximal portion, the plurality of projections being configured to intimately mate with the plurality of depressions such that the distal portion is held fixed relative to the proximal portion.

81. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 80 wherein the plurality of projections are configured to retract at least partially into the outer surface during insertion of the distal portion into the proximal portion.

82. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 80 wherein the proximal portion further defines a plurality of channels extending radially from the plurality of depressions defined in the inner surface to an outer surface of the proximal portion.

83. The microwave antenna assembly of claim 76 further comprising a dielectric material disposed between the proximal and distal portions.

84. A kit for applying microwave energy therapy comprising:
a microwave antenna assembly as described in claim 76; and
a power source for supplying power to the microwave antenna assembly.

85. The kit of claim 84 wherein the power source comprises a generator.

86. A method for delivering microwave energy therapy comprising:
positioning a first microwave antenna in a first position in or near a region of tissue to be treated;

positioning at least a second microwave antenna in a second position in or near the region of tissue to be treated;

applying microwave energy to the first and second microwave antennas such that a combined ablation region is created about the antennas for treating the region of tissue.

87. The method of claim 86 further comprising providing a first microwave antenna prior to positioning the antenna, the first microwave antenna comprising a proximal portion having an inner conductor and an outer conductor, each extending therethrough, the inner conductor disposed within the outer conductor; and a distal portion attached to the proximal portion such that the inner conductor extends at least partially therein, wherein each of the proximal and distal portions are configured to mate together such that the proximal and distal portions are fixedly positioned relative to one another by a mechanically engaging joint coupling the distal portion to the proximal portion.

88. The method of claim 86 further comprising positioning a plurality of additional microwave antennas in or near the region of tissue to be treated prior to applying the microwave energy.

89. The method of claim 88 wherein the plurality of additional microwave antennas are positioned in a triangular pattern in or near the region of tissue to be treated.

90. The method of claim 86 wherein applying microwave energy comprises simultaneously applying microwave energy to the first and second microwave antennas.

91. The method of claim 86 wherein applying microwave energy comprises sequentially applying microwave energy to the first and second microwave antennas.

92. The method of claim 91 wherein the microwave energy is applied sequentially via a channel splitter in electrical communication with a microwave energy generator.

93. The method of claim 91 further comprising cycling the microwave energy between at least the first and second microwave antennas.

94. The method of claim 86 wherein positioning the first microwave antenna comprises applying RF energy to a distal end of the first microwave antenna.

95. The method of claim 86 wherein positioning at least the second microwave antenna comprises applying RF energy to a distal end of at least the second microwave antenna.

96. The method of claim 86 wherein at least the second microwave antenna is positioned parallel to the first microwave antenna.

97. A microwave antenna system for applying microwave energy therapy comprising:

at least one microwave antenna comprising a proximal portion having an inner conductor and an outer conductor, each extending therethrough, the inner conductor disposed within the outer conductor, and a distal portion attached to the proximal portion such that the inner conductor extends at least partially therein;

an energy generator in communication with a proximal end of the microwave antenna; and

a channel splitter in electrical communication with the microwave energy generator, wherein the channel splitter is adapted to create multiple channels from a single channel received from the energy generator.

98. The system of claim 97 further comprising a controller in electrical communication with the channel splitter for controlling a cycling rate of the channel splitter.

99. The system of claim 98 wherein the controller is further adapted to detect whether an electrical connection to the antenna is present.

100. The system of claim 97 wherein the energy generator comprises a microwave energy generator.

101. The system of claim 97 wherein the energy generator comprises an RF energy generator.

102. The system of claim 97 wherein the distal portion has an insulative coating over at least a majority of the distal portion and wherein a distal tip is uncovered by the insulative coating.

103. The system of claim 97 wherein the inner conductor is slidably disposed within the outer conductor such that a distal portion of the inner conductor is distally extendable past the distal portion.

104. The system of claim 97 wherein each of the proximal and distal portions are configured to mate together such that the proximal and distal portions are fixedly positioned relative to one another by a mechanically engaging joint coupling the distal portion to the proximal portion.

105. A microwave antenna system for applying microwave energy therapy comprising:

at least one microwave antenna comprising an inner conductor and an outer conductor,

wherein the inner conductor is disposed within the outer conductor such that the inner conductor extends at least partially therewithin and is slidingly disposed such that a distal portion of the inner conductor is distally extendable past the outer conductor while applying energy to the distal portion.

106. The system of claim 105 further comprising an energy generator in communication with a proximal end of the microwave antenna.

107. The system of claim 106 wherein the energy generator comprises a microwave energy generator.

108. The system of claim 106 wherein the energy generator comprises an RF energy generator.

109. The system of claim 108 wherein the energy applied to the distal portion of the inner conductor comprises RF energy.

110. The system of claim 106 further comprising a channel splitter in electrical communication with the energy generator, wherein the channel splitter is adapted to create multiple channels from a single channel received from the energy generator.

111. The system of claim 110 further comprising a controller in electrical communication with the channel splitter for controlling a cycling rate of the channel splitter.

112. The system of claim 111 wherein the controller is further adapted to detect whether an electrical connection to the antenna is present.

113. The system of claim 105 further comprising a choke disposed at least partially over the outer conductor.

114. The system of claim 105 wherein the inner conductor has an insulative coating over at least a majority of the inner conductor and wherein a distal tip of the inner conductor is uncovered by the insulative coating.

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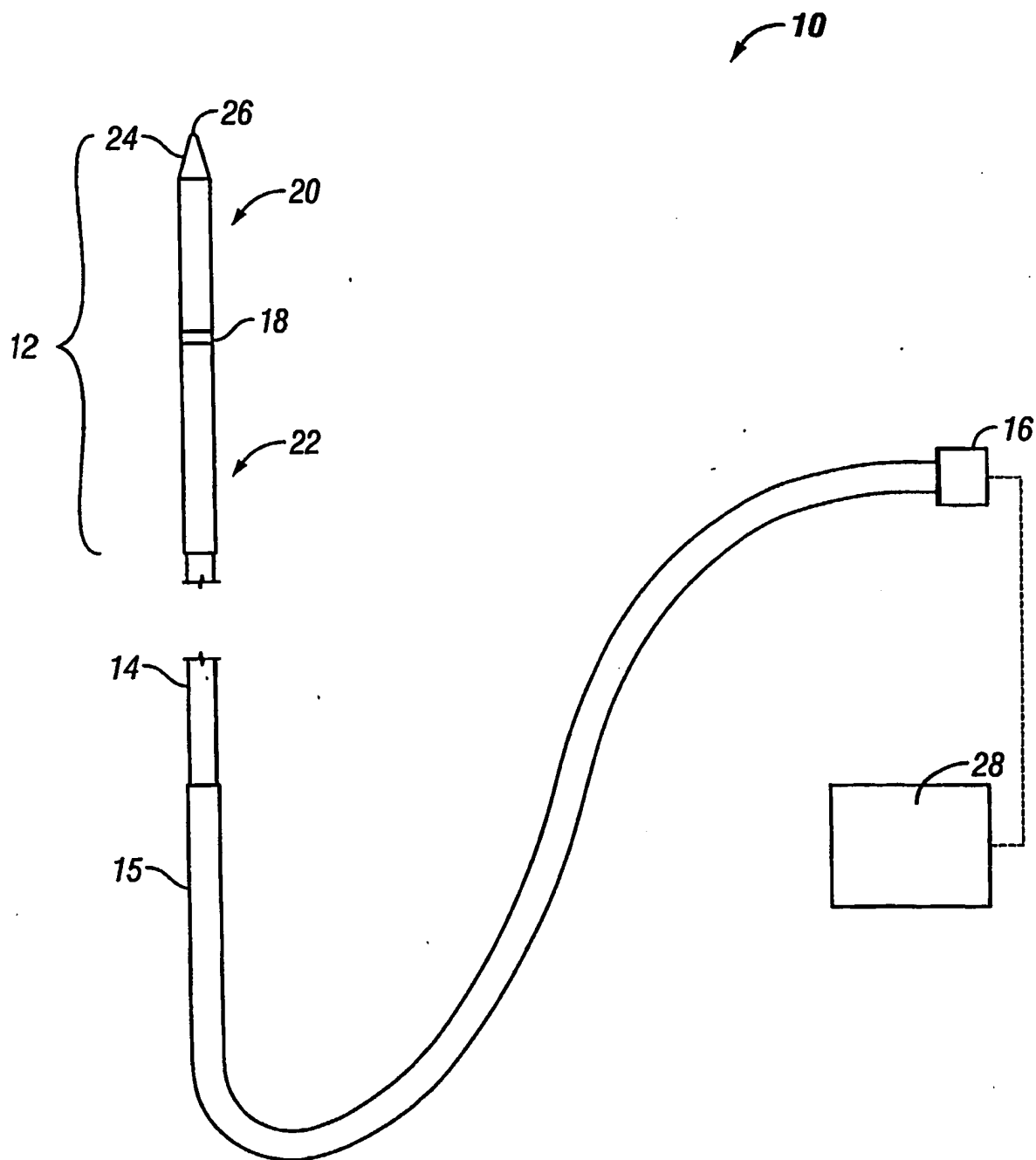
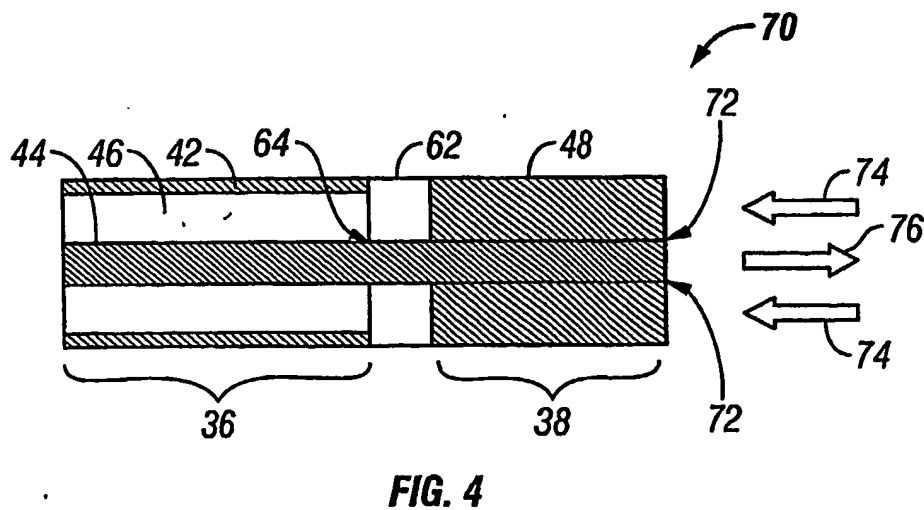
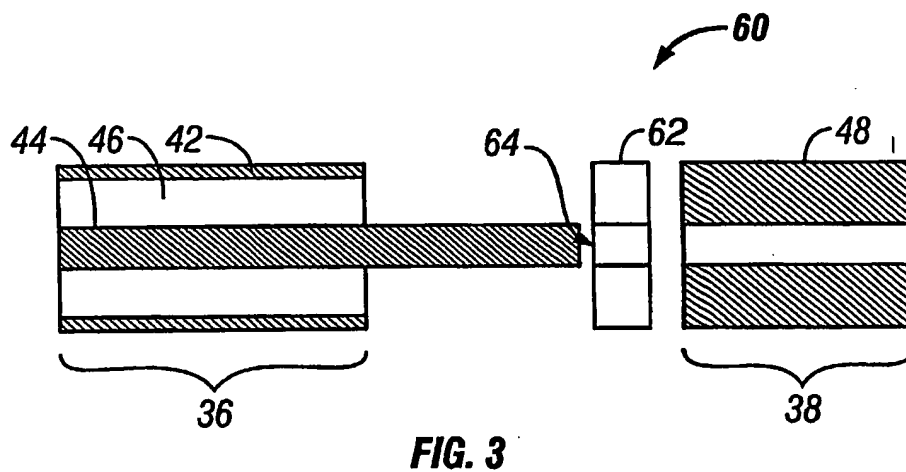
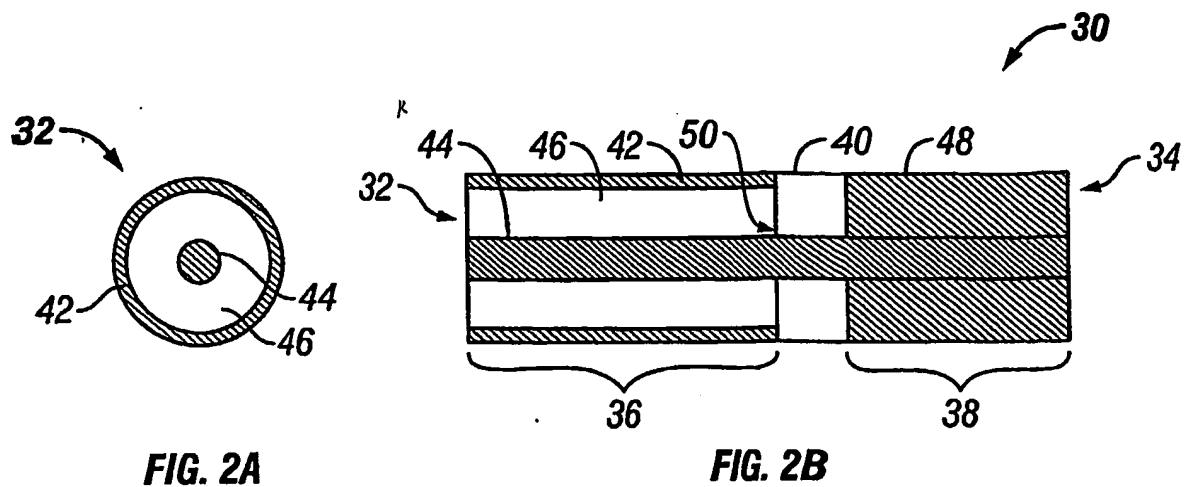


FIG. 1

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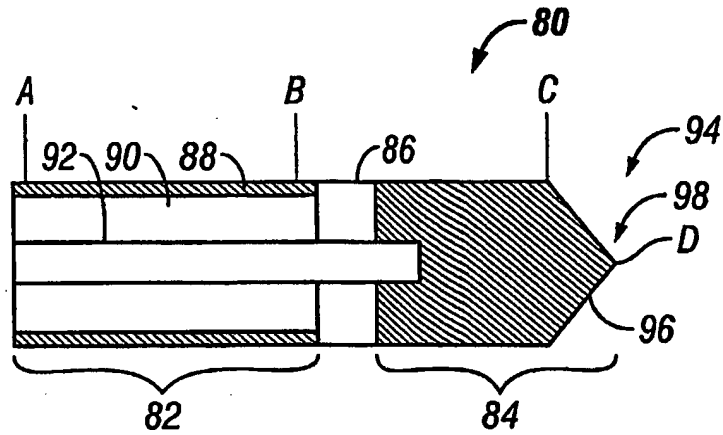


FIG. 5

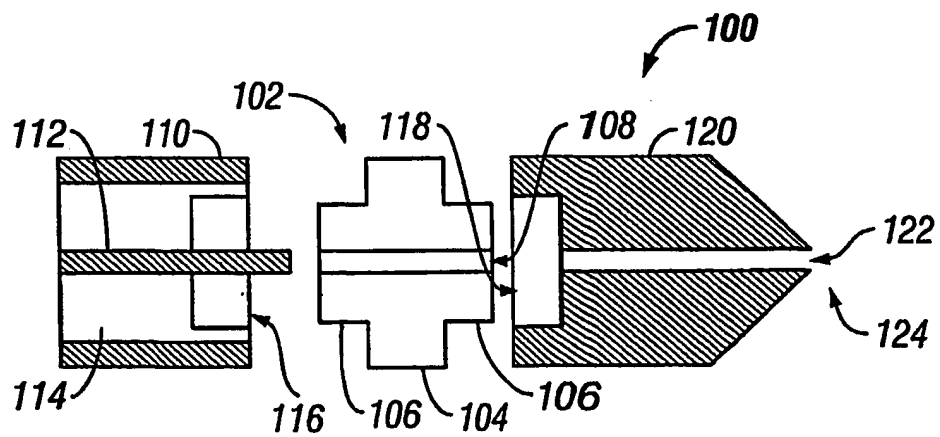


FIG. 6

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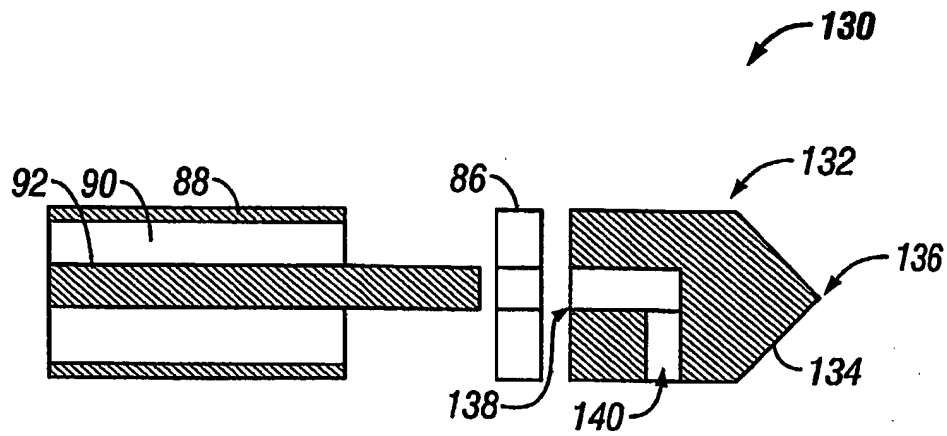


FIG. 7

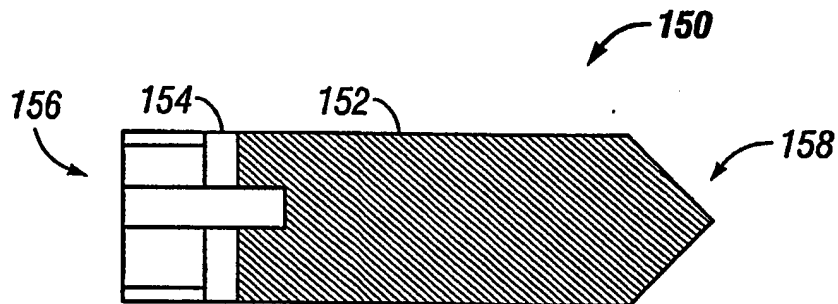


FIG. 8

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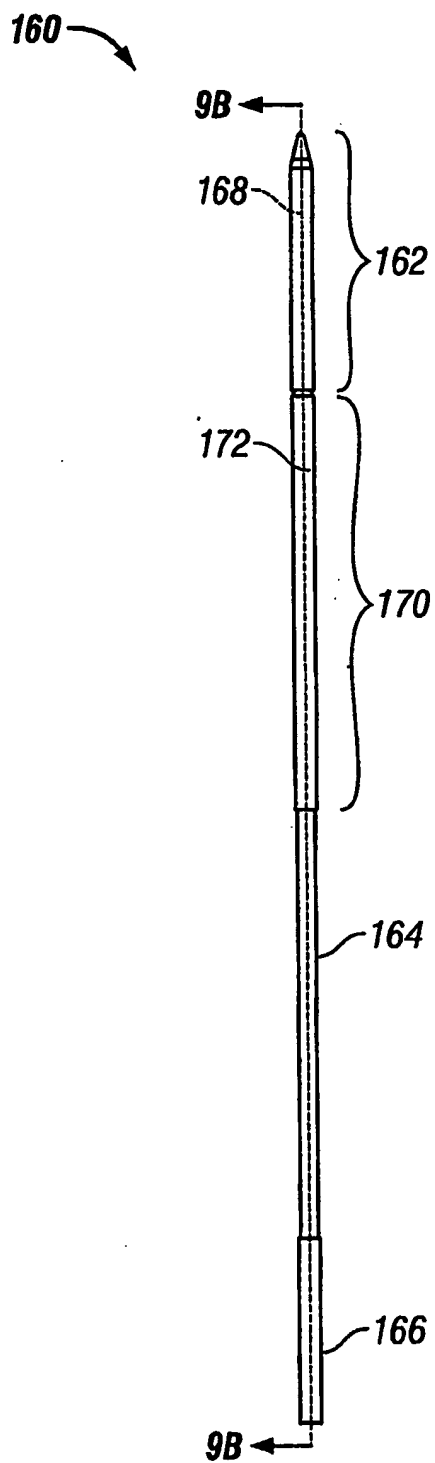


FIG. 9A

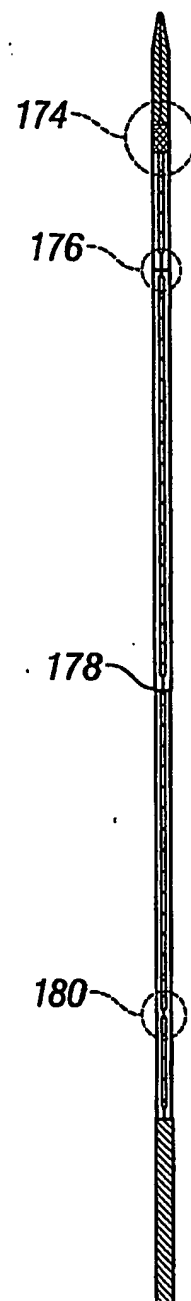


FIG. 9B

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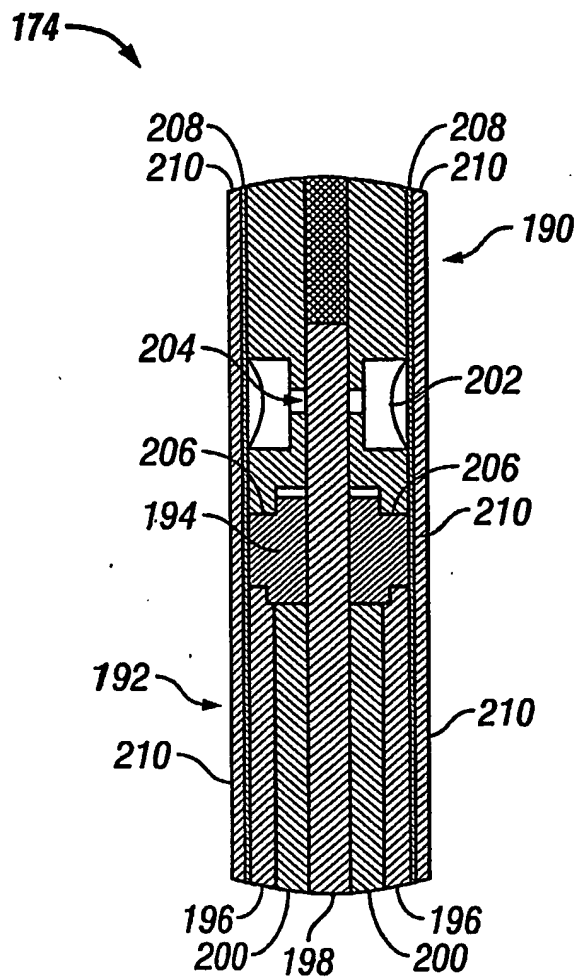


FIG. 10

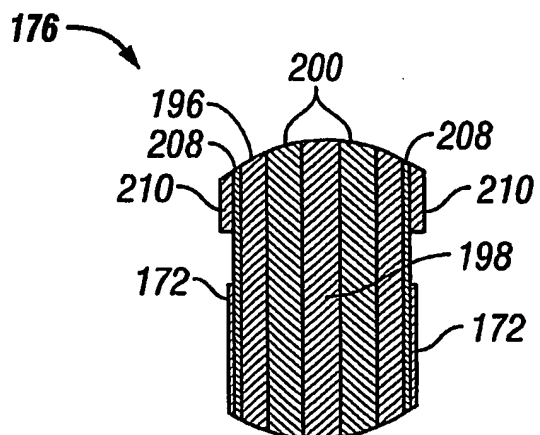


FIG. 11

SUBSTITUTE SHEET (RULE 26)

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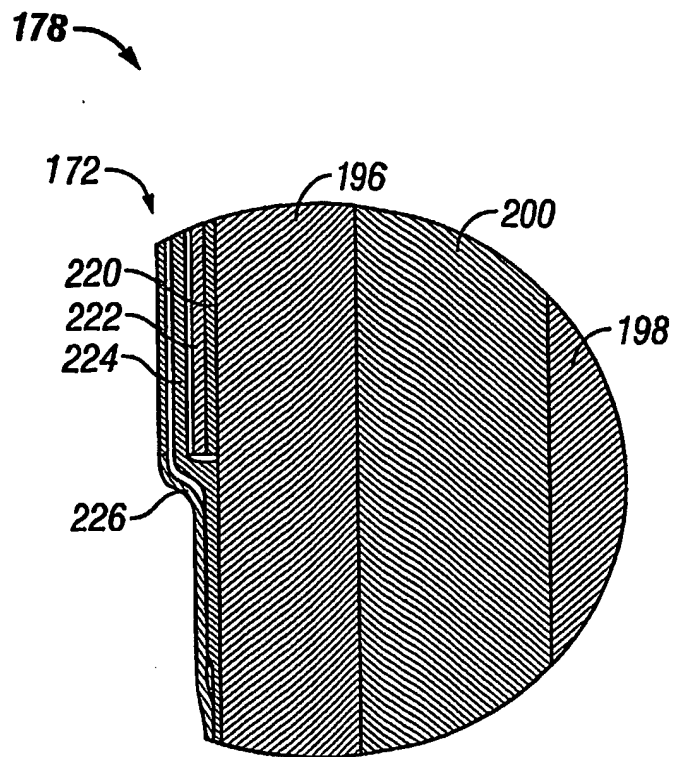


FIG. 12

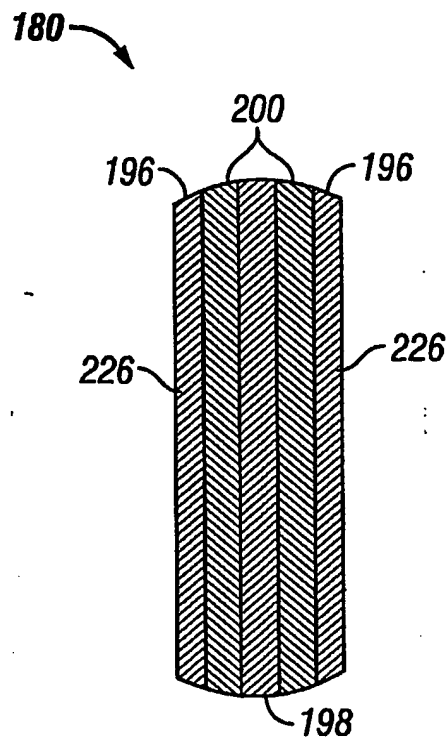


FIG. 13

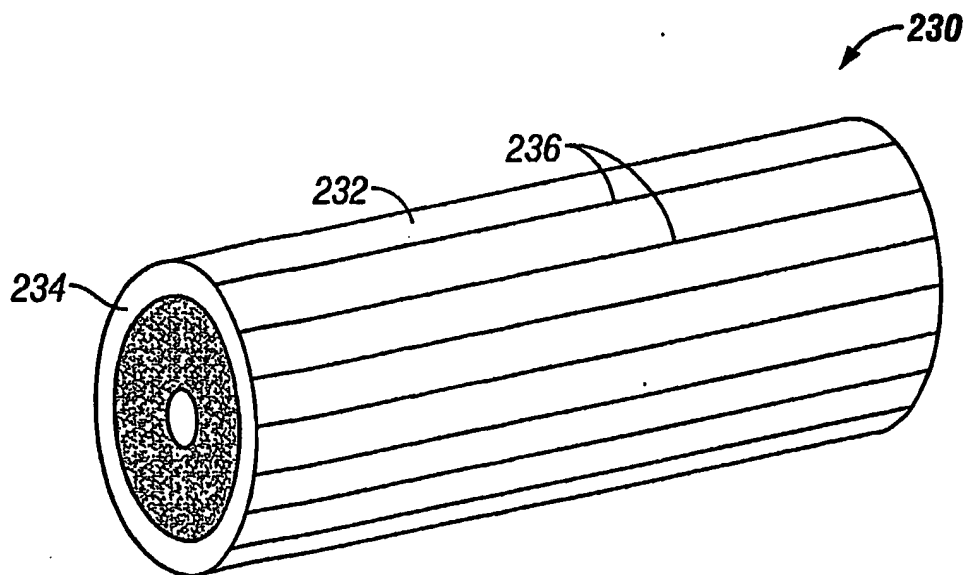


FIG. 14

SUBSTITUTE SHEET (RULE 26)

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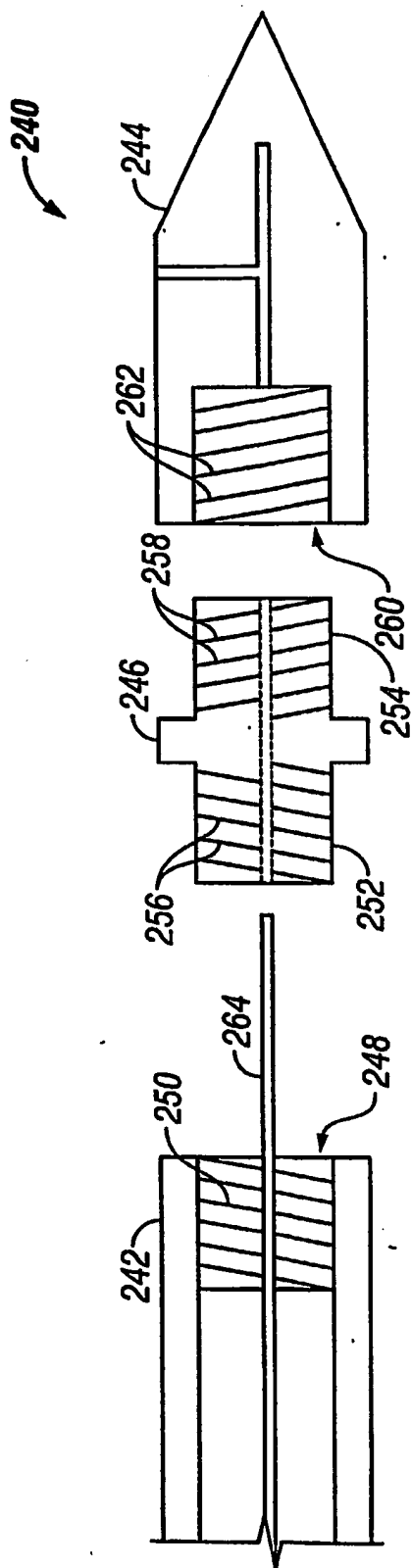


FIG. 15

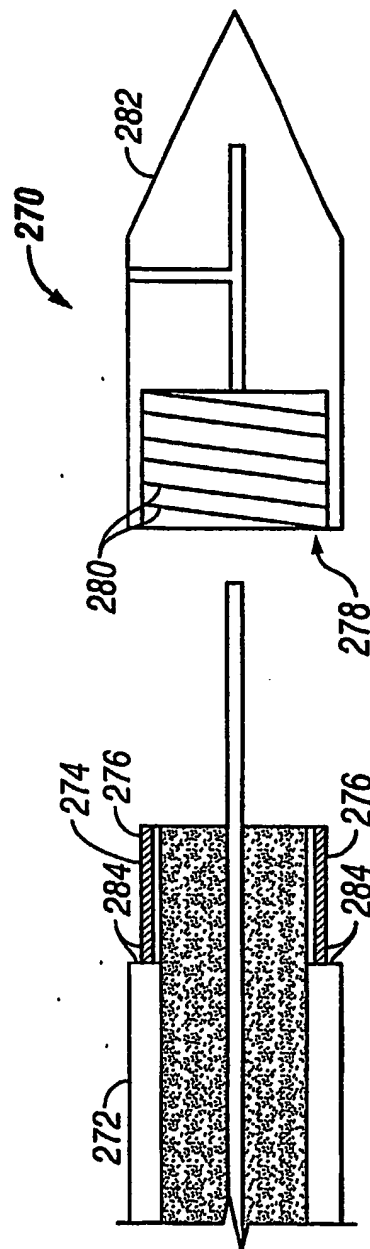


FIG. 16

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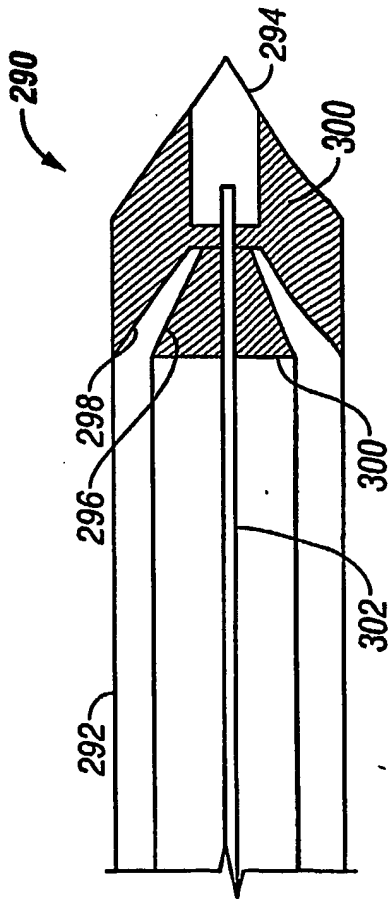


FIG. 17

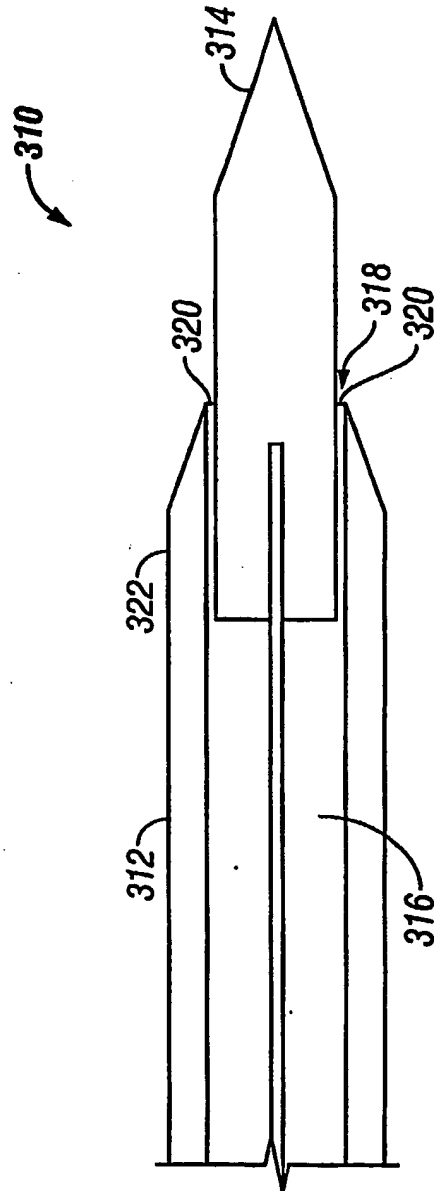


FIG. 18

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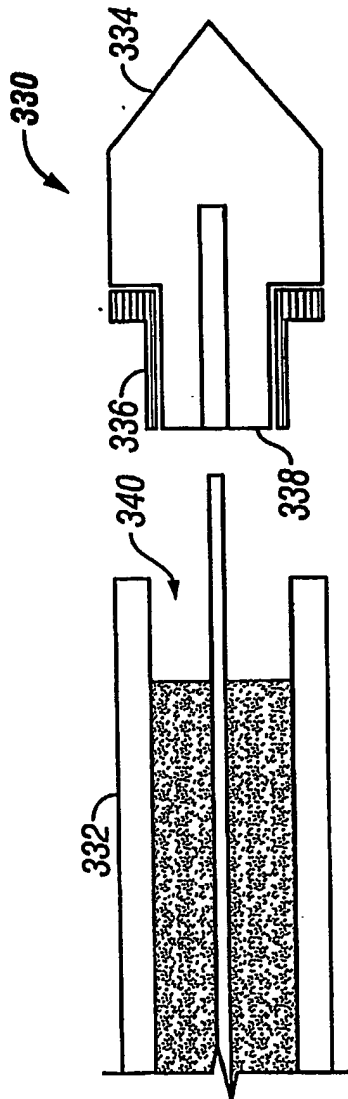


FIG. 19

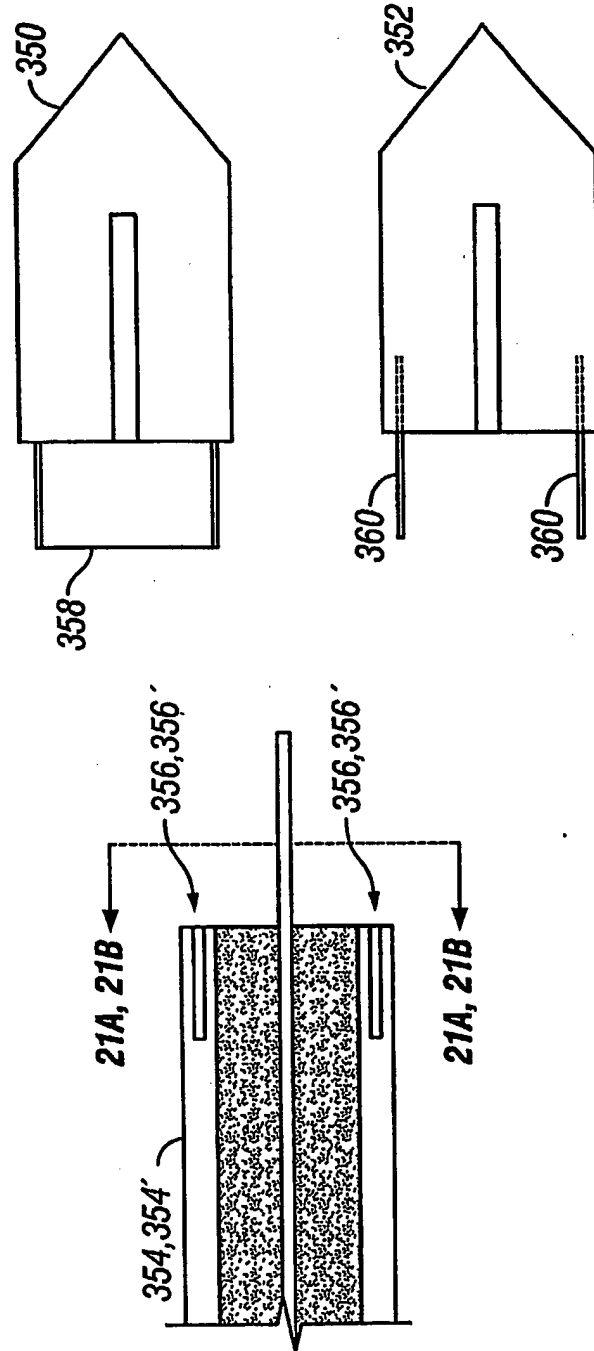


FIG. 20

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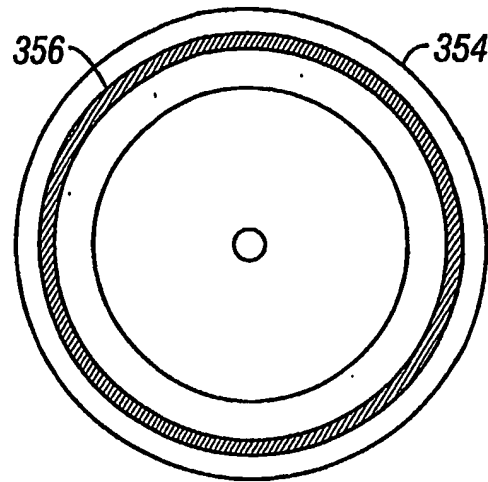


FIG. 21A

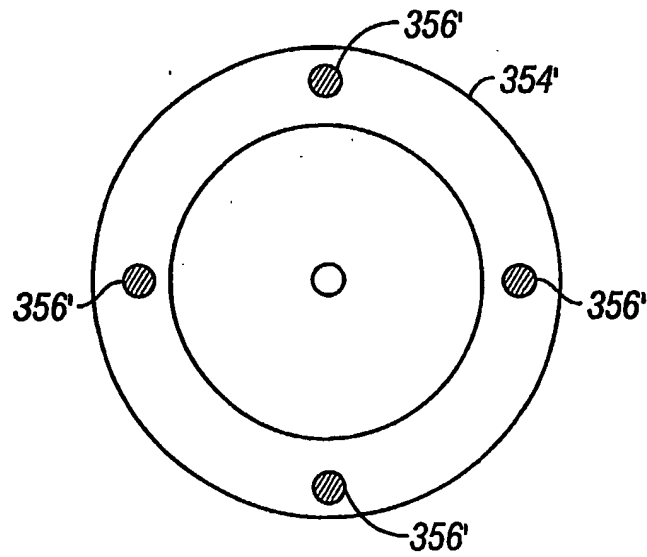


FIG. 21B

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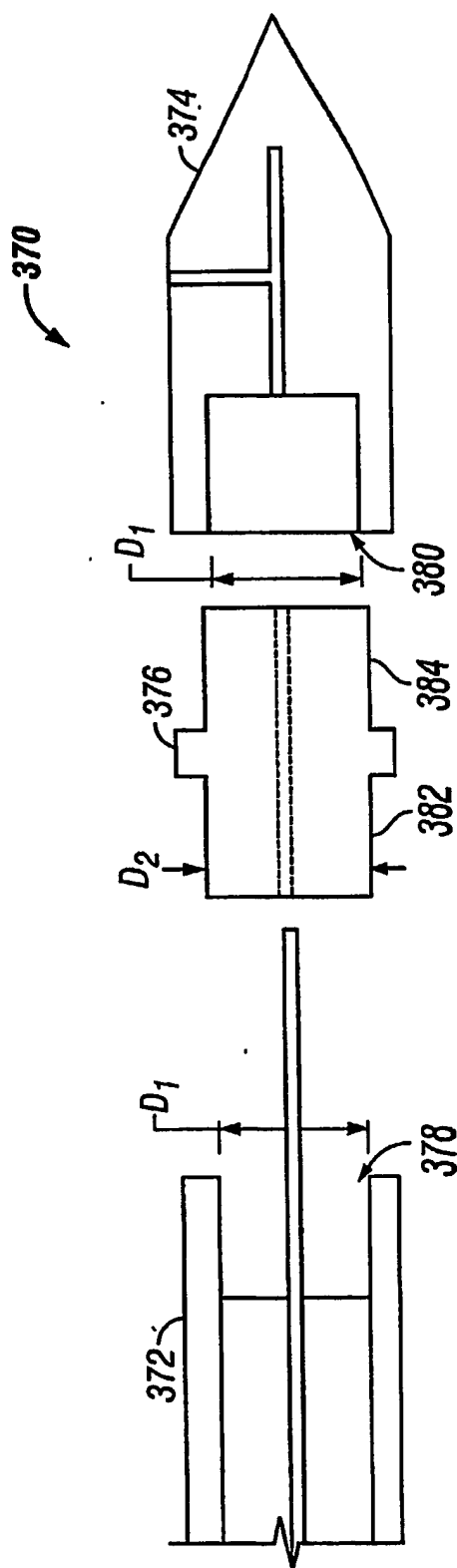


FIG. 22

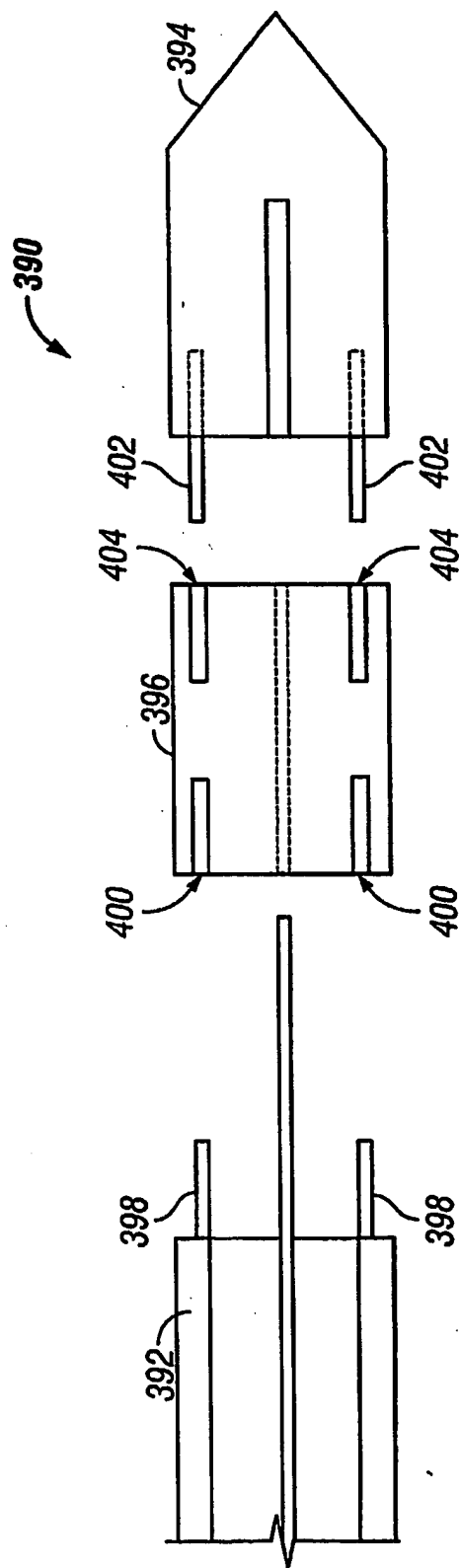


FIG. 23

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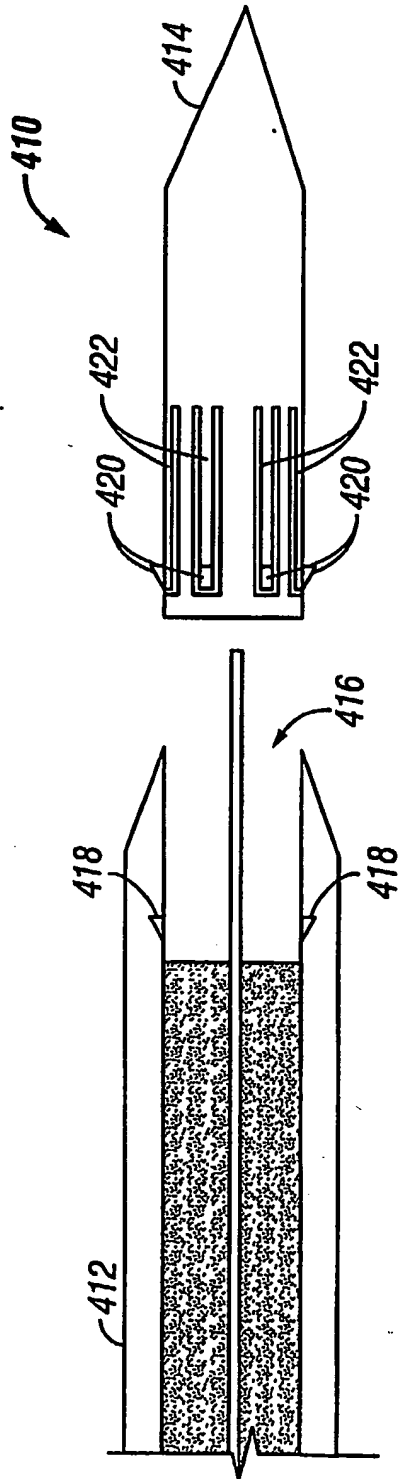


FIG. 24

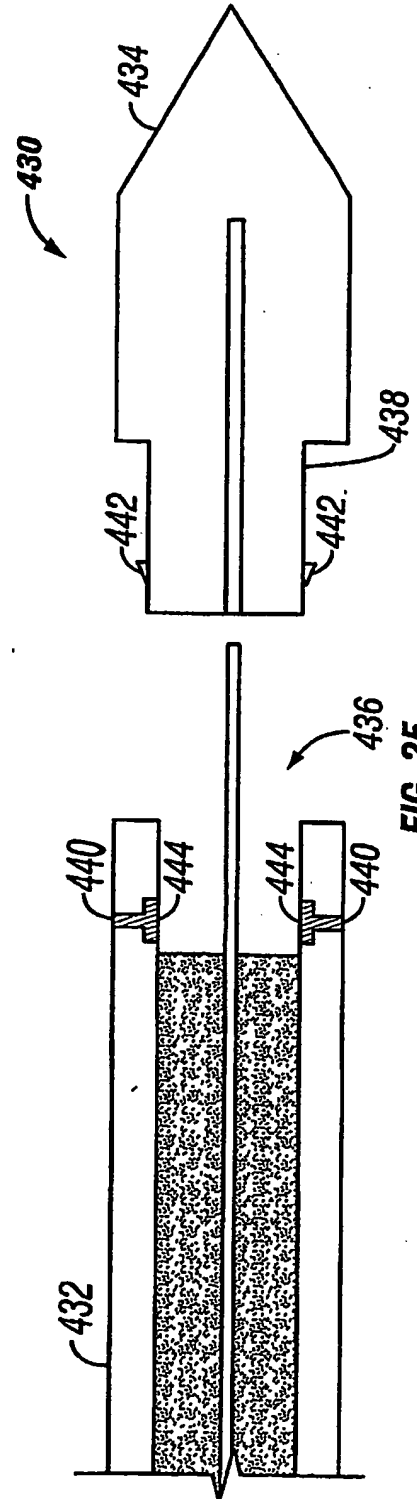


FIG. 25

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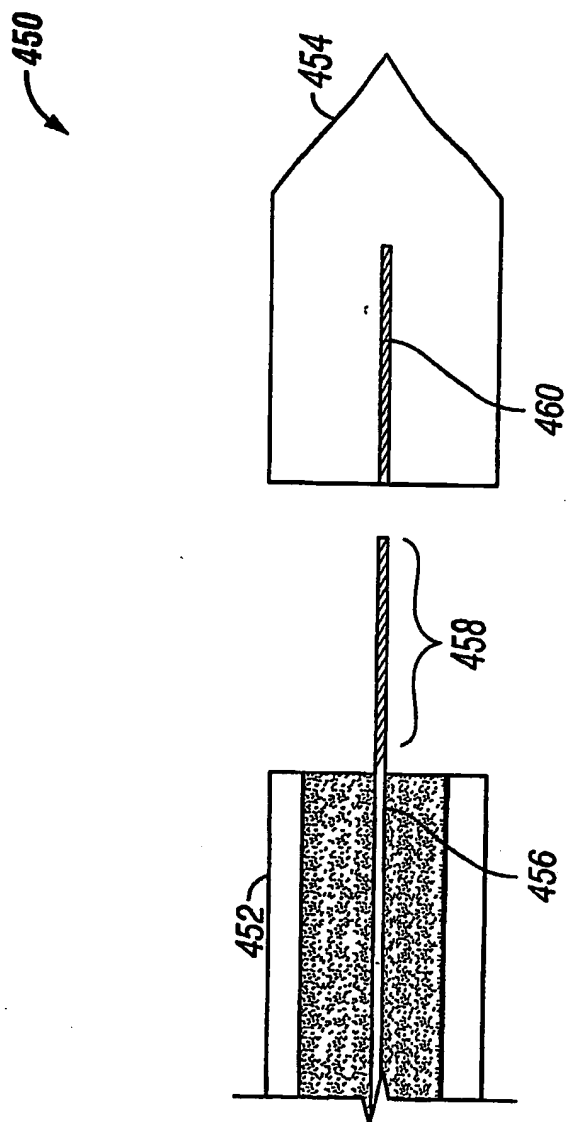


FIG. 26

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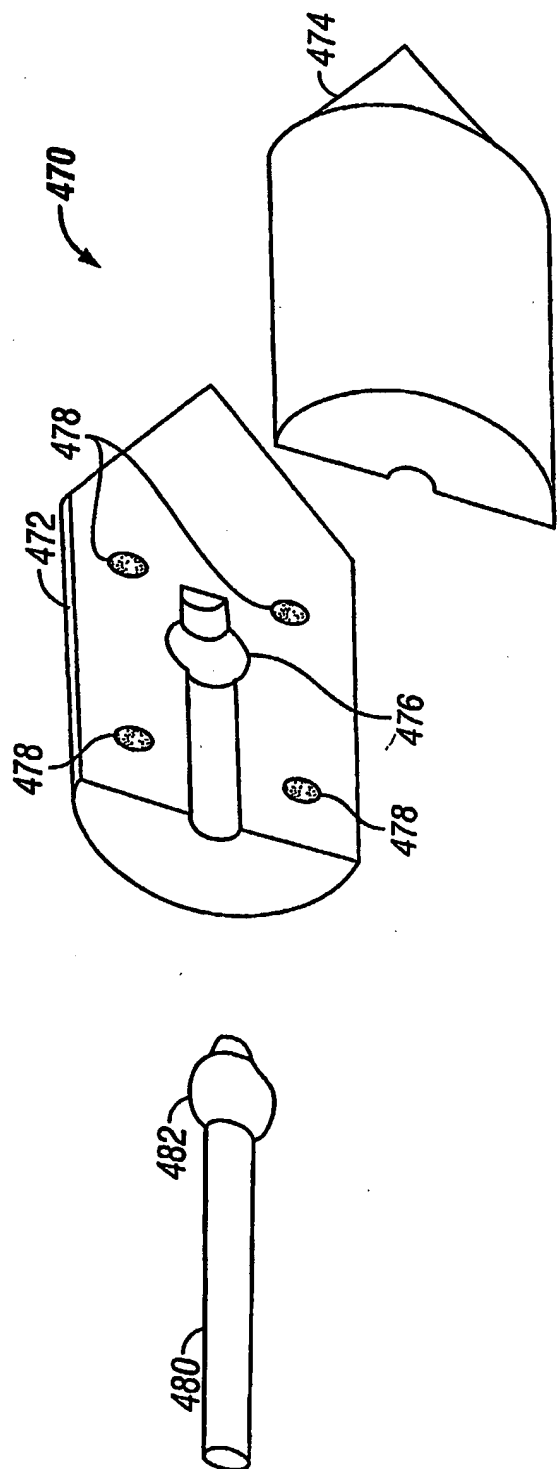


FIG. 27

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490

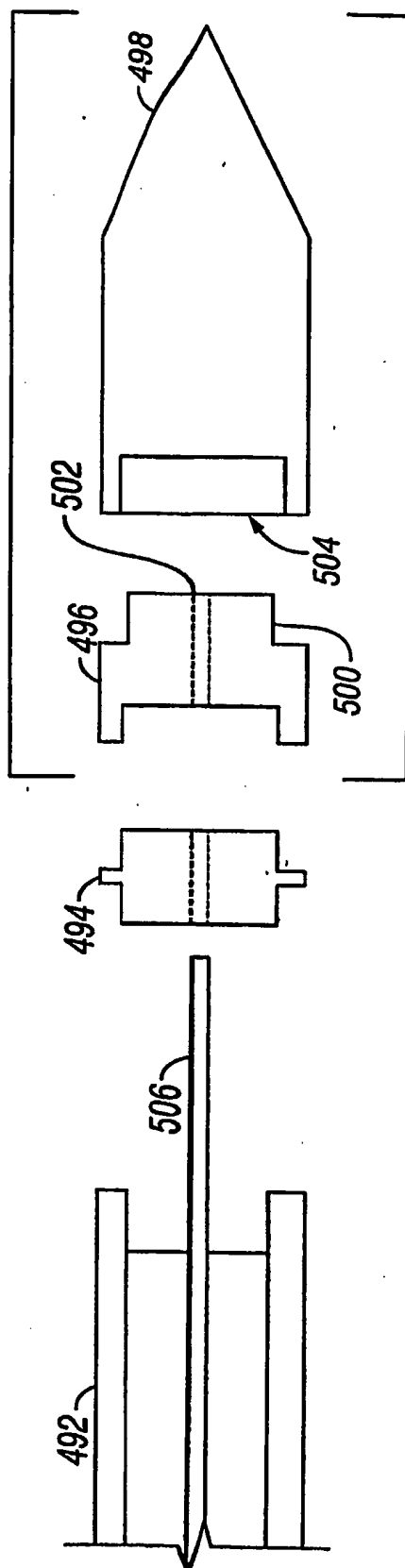


FIG. 28

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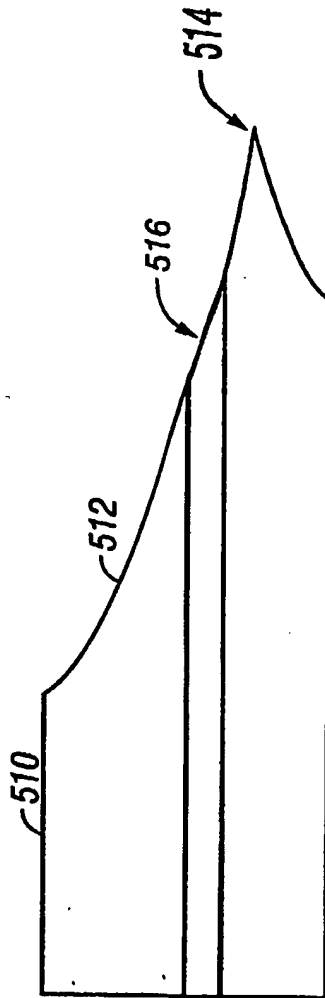


FIG. 29



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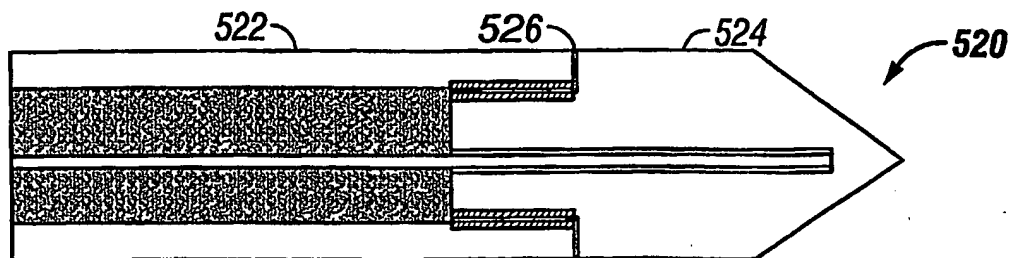


FIG. 30

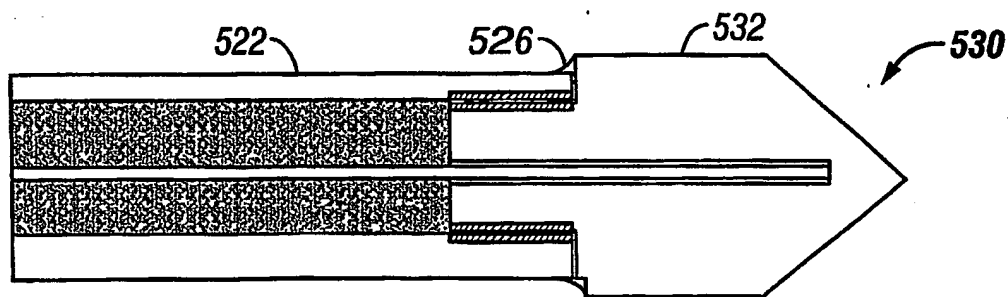


FIG. 31

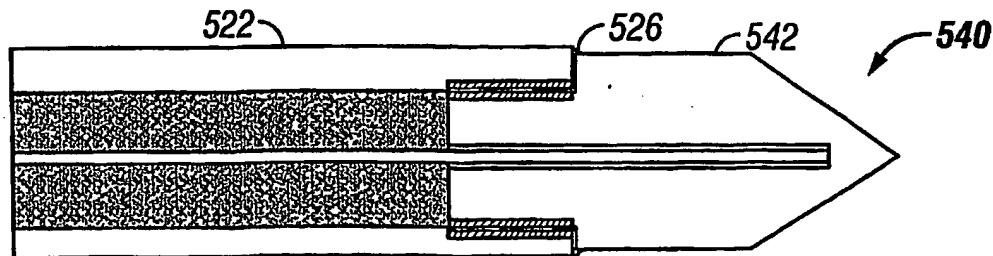


FIG. 32

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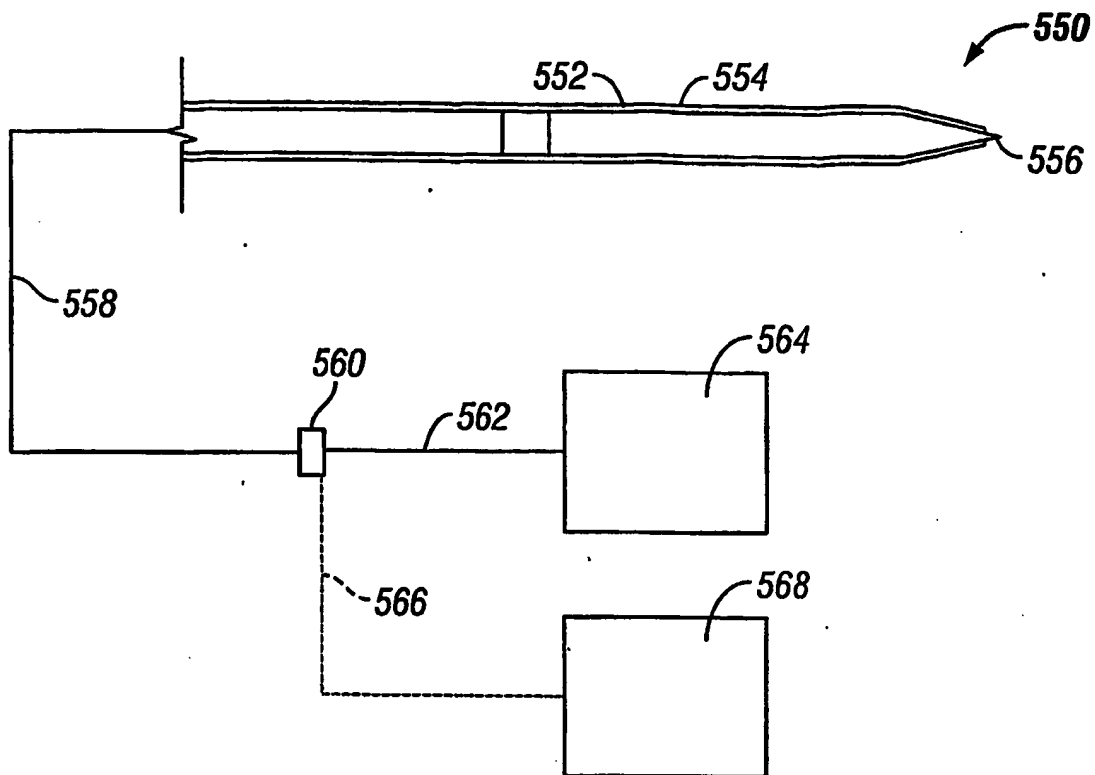


FIG. 33

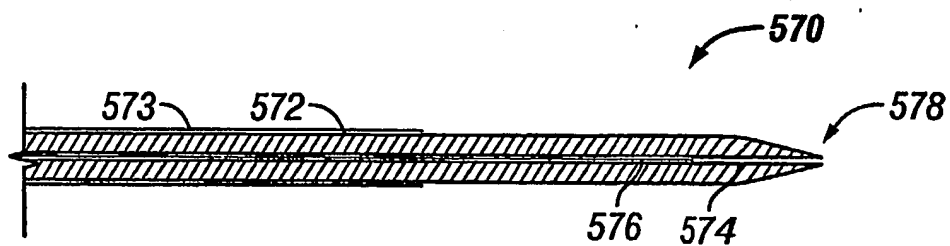


FIG. 34A

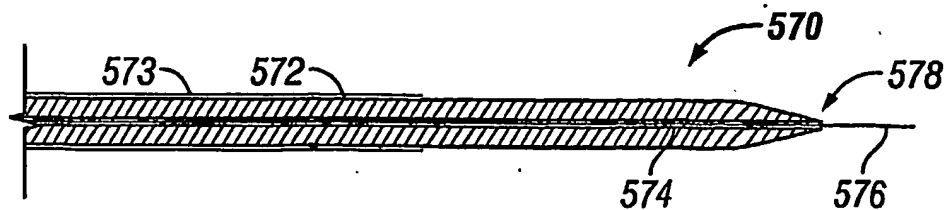


FIG. 34B

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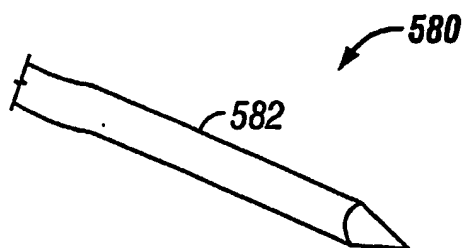


FIG. 35A

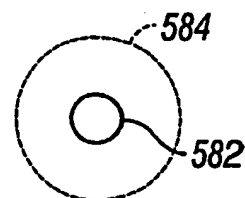


FIG. 35B

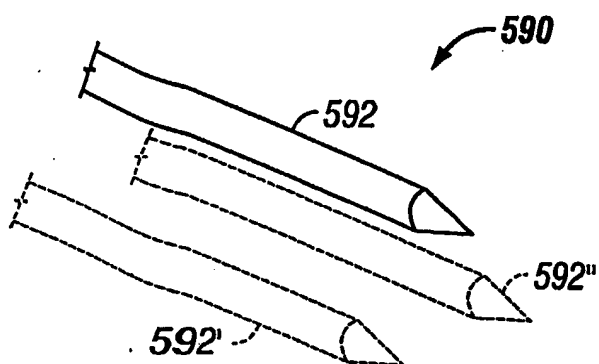


FIG. 36A

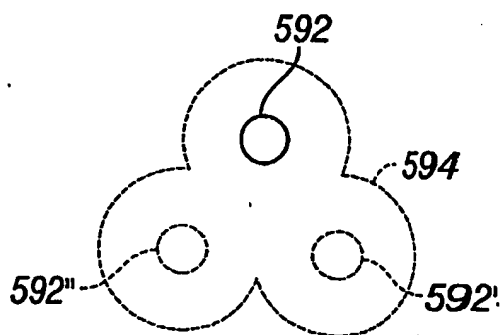


FIG. 36B

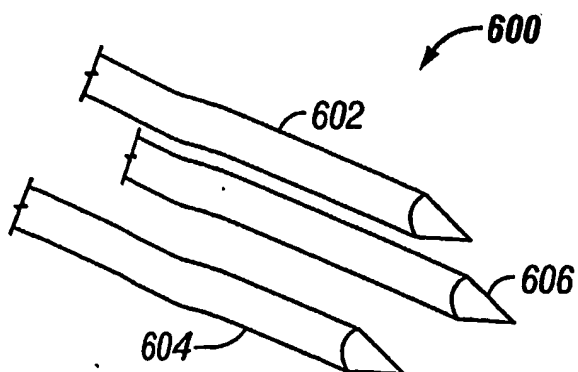


FIG. 37A

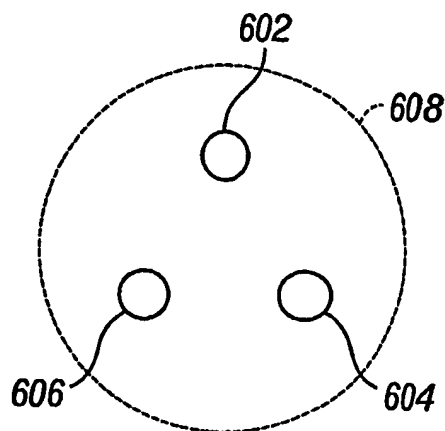


FIG. 37B

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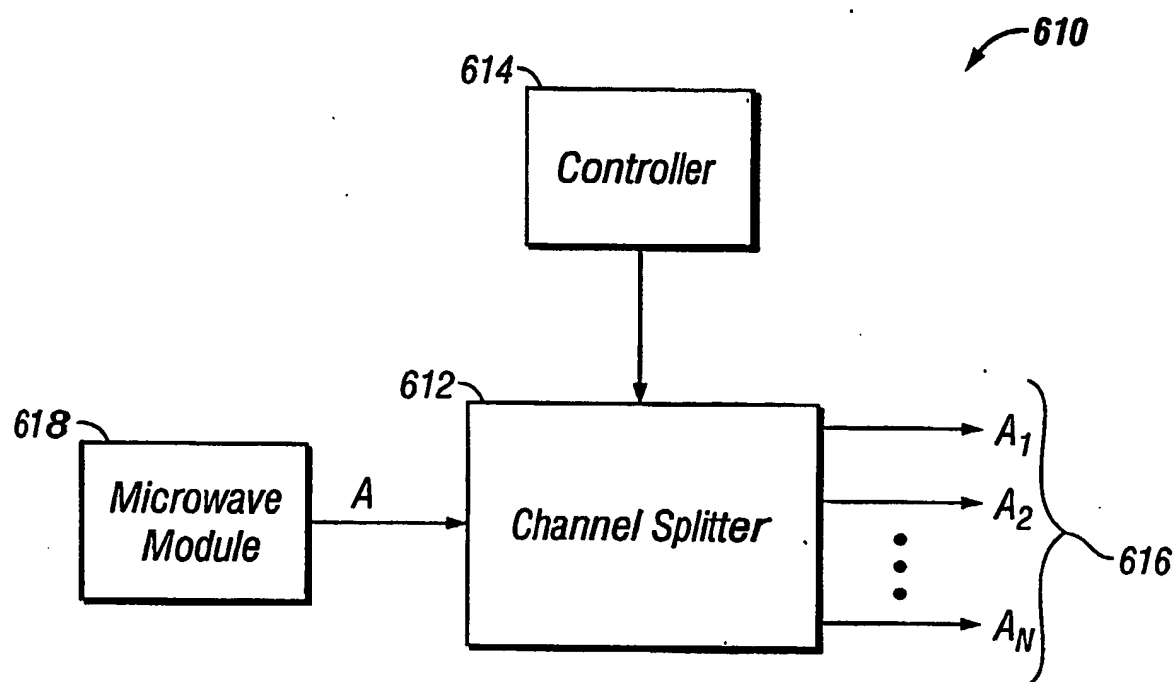


FIG. 38

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT/US02/34827

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC(7) : A61B 18/04

US CL : 606/33

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

U.S. : 606/33, 606/32-52; 607/96-103

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

| Category * | Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages | Relevant to claim No. |
|---------------|--|---|
| X --- Y | US 5,314,466 A (Stern et al) 24 May 1994 (24.05.1994), entire document. | 1-5,7-27,29-34,36-55,57-58,60-85 ----- 6,28,35,56,59,97-114 |
| X, P | US 6,275,738 B1 (Kasevich et al.) 14 August 2001 (14.08.2001), entire document. | 86-96 |
| Y, E | US 6,346,104 B2 (Daly et al.) 12 February 2002 (12.02.2002), entire document. | 97-114 |

☐ Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.

☐ See patent family annex.

* Special categories of cited documents:

| | |
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| "P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed | |

Date of the actual completion of the international search

07 February 2003 (07.02.2003)

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23 APR 2003

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